MORE STORIES - MORE PAGES!

The saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IN THIS ISSUE

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

MANNING COLES

JULIAN SYMONS

VAL GIELGUD

STEWART STERLING

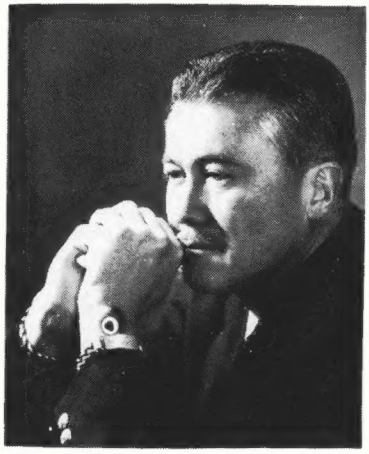
WATCH FOR The saint ON TV

BEGINNING

vendetta for the saint

A New Book-length Novel by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



The mystery story today is in a period of decline.

That is an unhappy realization for a man who has devoted all his working life to writings that are popularly classified under that heading, as mine are, even though I have not written many true "mysteries" of the traditional puzzle type; but the facts and the statistics must be faced.

There are vogues in literature, as in all forms of entertainment, which change continually like women's fashions, if not as quickly. The western story, which made such great names as Zane Grey, is now almost defunct in print, although not seriously ailing on TV—yet. And there is a real danger that the next decade may see the crime story follow it to oblivion, except for those ultra-modern travesties in which the crime is merely an excuse to describe some loutish gumshoe slapping girls around and tearing their clothes off, if he can beat them to it, which no aficionado of honest mysteries would be caught dead in a library of.

The reason, I think, stems from the paralytic sloth which is one of the outstanding degeneracies of our time. To write a good mystery story requires more genuine mental effort, albeit unrecognizable to snob critics, than any other kind of story: you actually have to have a plot, an enigma, a story line, unexpected but logical twists and developments, motives, deductions, and convincing argument, instead of merely trailing a few random characters through aimless errands and aberrations for the required number of pages. To read a good mystery was once considered a pleasant mental exercise, to see if the writer could outwit you or you could outguess him. But the very word "exercise" today arouses a subconscious resentment in a generation of sports lovers who love to watch sports from the grandstand, golfers who trudge around the course in electric buggies, and even the average stalwart citizen who thinks nothing of driving ten times around the block to find a parking space that will not make him walk more than ten yards to the supermarket.

A stray which points the current direction of this wind is the repetition of the words "miracle" and "magic" in today's advertising. From every printed advertisement and broadcast commercial we are bombarded with offers of miracle drugs, miracle polishes, miracle deodorants; or magic cleaners, magic lubricants, or magic bunion removers; the hucksters (who are depressingly often right) have discovered that what the customer wants most is anything that will do anything for you, by miracle magic, without any expenditure of time or effort on your part. My good friend David Lewin, surveying the recent rise in syndicated or broadcast punditry in all fields, has even discovered the sinister sequel which he has brilliantly called Instant Think.

Confronting a juggernaut of such momentum, the writers, editors, and publishers of this Magazine can only thank you, the dwindling public for whom reading is still fun and not a chore, for helping our stand against the tide.

To take liberties with a couple of other classics: *Moribundi non carborundi* — we may be dying, but we ain't ground down.

Erle Stanley Gardner

The saint ®
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1964

VOL. 20, No. 1

Vendetta for the Saint 3
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Brazen Serpent 47
by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

Handcuffs Don't Hold Ghosts 63
by MANNING COLES

The Saint on TV 83
A MONTHLY COLUMN

Who Killed the Drama Critic? 85
by VAL GIELGUD

Mud in the Devil's Eye 89
by S. A. FAY

A Taste for Art 102
by JULIAN SYMONS

Dead Hero 106
by LAWRENCE V. FISHER

The Saint in Modern Art (?)—III 131
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

What's New in Crime 132
by STEFAN SANTESSON

Homicide—Hot Off the Griddle 135
by STEWART STERLING

Leslie Charteris
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164

vendetta for the saint

by Leslie Charteris

I. How Simon Templar's Lunch was Delayed, and his Wardrobe suffered for it.

IT WAS THE pleasant pause after the *antipasto* when the healthy appetite, only slightly assuaged by the opening course, rests in happy anticipation of good things to come. The *Rose del Vesuvio* was cool and light on Simon Templar's tongue, and for a few rare minutes in his adventurous life he prepared to surrender to whatever gastronomic pleasures Naples might provide, and tried not to think of certain other distractions for which that city is also somewhat notorious. Somewhere behind him, in the cavernous depths of Le Arcate, the restaurant where he sat, a lobster was leaving the humble ranks of the crustacea and being ushered into the realm of great art in the guise of *Aragosta alla Vesuvio*. This was a moment to be savored and treasured to the full.

Therefore the loud and angry voice which suddenly disturbed his peaceful mood was a gross and egregious intrusion.

IT MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE THE FATE OF ANYONE TO COLLIDE HEAD-ON WITH THE MAFIA. BUT SIMON TEMPLAR HAD TO DO IT THE HARD WAY — — ON THEIR OWN HOME GROUND, IN SICILY.

"Go away!" it snarled. "I don't know you!"

Simon turned a little in his chair for better observation of the tableau, which he had quite disinterestedly noticed as it developed.

The source of the grating voice sat a couple of tables away, a man in at least his late fifties, whose paunchy build was well masked by some superb tailoring in pearl-gray raw silk. Under the coat was a shirt of the finest chambray, clinched at the throat with a hand-painted tie nailed by a diamond pin and at the wrists with cuff-links of ten-carat star sapphires. On one highly manicured finger he wore a massive gold ring which served to frame a cabochon emerald the size of a pigeon's egg. But in spite of all this expensive elegance, his face was completely nondescript, looking as if it had been roughly thrown together in clay by a rather unskillful sculptor as a base to model a proper portrait on. All its features were untidy except the lipless slit of the mouth and the sparse border of carefully barbered hair plastered down around the gleamingly bald dome.

His companion was perhaps twenty years younger and dressed at less than one-twentieth the cost, with broad shoulders and curly black hair and the looks of any untravelled spinster's conception of a Venetian gondolier, somewhat gone to seed. Intellectually they seemed to have even less in common, for they had hardly exchanged half a dozen words while they were under Simon's indifferent attention. They had finished their meal and were sipping coffee when the third of the *dramatis personae* had arrived.

This one was as obviously English as he was a gentleman. His flannel pants and Harris tweed jacket were of unmistakable origin, and the act of wearing them in Naples in mid-summer proved that their owner, conditioned by damper and chillier climes, stubbornly regarded them as the only correct holiday wear for any country. The cut and texture of the cloth, as well as the hand-rubbed glaze on the conservatively laced shoes, indicated a man of means and good taste within rigidly traditional limits. Yet this was the individual who had, apparently, committed the frightfully un-British solecism of annoying a total stranger.

He had been strolling past the terrace, gazing all around like any tourist, when he had had a delayed reaction, stopped, turned, stared, hesitated, and finally turned in to address the putty-faced plutocrat who had responded so uncivilly.

"But, Dino!" stammered the

tourist, with acute embarrassment heightening the color of his naturally ruddy complexion. "I know it's a long time ago, but don't you remember me?"

"What is this Dino?" The answering growl had an American accent that was incurably Italian at the same time. "I don't know no Dino. Don't bother me."

"I'm Jimmy Euston," persisted the Englishman, struggling to hold on to his temper and his dignity. "Have you forgotten Palermo? The bank? And that scar on your chin—"

The seated man's fingers moved involuntarily to an inconspicuous white cicatrice on the side of his jaw.

"You're crazy with the heat," he said. "Beat it, before I get mad!"

"Now look here, Dino—"

The response was no more than a flicker of a finger, a fractional movement of the head, but it brought the other man at the table smoothly to his feet. He grasped the Englishman by the arm, and what happened next would have been missed by any spectator but Simon.

Euston's mouth opened soundlessly, and his red face became white. He bent forward, attacked by a sudden spasm. Simon, to whom such tactics were as familiar as elementary drill to a sergeant, recognized at once what had happened: under cover of the victim's body and his own, the curly-haired one had delivered a short wicked jab to the solar plexus.

There was more to come. The goon's arm drew back again, and the cheap striped suiting wrinkled over a bulge of powerful muscles. Once again the contraction came that would send the arm forward again with enough force to crack a rib.

Except that this time the conclusion failed to materialize. If a steel vise anchored to a stone pillar had suddenly appeared and clamped home around the elbow, the arm would have been no more firmly fixed. With shocked incredulity the goondolier turned and gaped at the browned fingers that locked casually on his arm and rendered it immobile. From there his gaze travelled up over the broad chest and sinewy neck to the intruder's face, the tanned face of a buccaneer with blue eyes that laughed and yet were colder than an arctic sea.

"That's very naughty," Simon remarked.

If it had not been for the tenseness of imminent explosion, they would have made an almost comic trio, joined arm to arm like three convivial friends about to burst into song. But there was a far from convivial expression in the yellowed and bloodshot stare of the man whom Simon

held, a darkening menace that brought a hopeful smile to Simon's lips.

"Try it on me, chum," he invited softly. "Try anything—and I promise you'll wake up in hospital."

"*Basta!*" grumbled the man who denied being Dino. "They must be from the same nuthouse. Let's get outa here."

In an instant, the threatened eruption was dissipated. Obediently the bodyguard released Euston, and turned to pull the table aside for his patron. Simon let him go, a trifle reluctantly, but reflecting that what might have been a delightful brawl would probably have been broken up by spoilsport policemen and very likely resulted in his *Aragosta* getting cold while they conducted the post-mortem.

A banknote fluttered down between the coffee cups, and the foppish slob turned his back and walked away, followed by his two-legged dog; and Simon shrugged and looked at Mr. Euston again. The elderly Englishman's face was still blanched, and beaded with perspiration from the effects of the single cruel blow he had taken.

"Sit down at my table for a minute," Simon said, guiding him in that direction even while he spoke. "Have a drop of wine." He poured a glass. "Or something stronger, if you feel like it. That was quite a dirty poke you took."

"Thank you. I'll be all right in a jiffy."

Color returned slowly to the other's face while he sipped—a little too much, perhaps, Simon realized, as it ripened towards the masculine cousin of a blush. Mr. Euston had not only suffered a public humiliation, but he found himself indebted to someone to whom he had not even been introduced.

"My name's Euston," he mumbled unnecessarily. "Jolly decent of you to come to the rescue, Mr.—"

Alternative replies flashed through the circuits of Simon Templar's mind with an electronic speed developed from much similar experience, to be weighed and compared and chosen from according to the circumstances. He could give his real name, and risk a recognitive "Not the chap they call The Saint? The Robin Hood of Modern Crime? Well, bless my soul!" —and so forth. Or he could give one of the aliases to which he had become sentimentally attached—so much so that even some of them ran a fifty-fifty chance of recognition in certain circles. Or he could improvise a new identity—a creative effort which the present situation might hardly justify . . . So quickly that no one would even have

noticed any hesitation, he selected the middle course.

"Tombs," he said, and won the toss-up gamble. "Sebastian Tombs." It struck no spark from James Euston. "Think nothing of it. But next time you make a mistaken identification, it might be a good idea not to insist on it too hard."

"But it wasn't a mistake," Euston said, mopping his brow. "I'll swear he was Dino Cartelli, a chap I worked with in Sicily before the war. I was training for the foreign department of the City and Continental then, and a year at their branch in Palermo was part of the course. Dino worked next to me, and we were fairly good friends. Except for the time when he got that scar."

'How did that happen?"

"I gave it to him. It was a difference of opinion, Latin temperament and all that, over some girl. He opened a knife and I had to hit him. I wasn't an amateur champion or anything like that, but my signet ring cut him."

Simon's interested regard took a quizzical slant.

"Well, that might account for why he didn't see you as a long-lost buddy."

"Oh, no, we didn't start a vendetta. The girl ran off with somebody else and left us both feeling silly. We apologized to each other and made up, and we were still good friends again when I was sent to another post. And yet now he not only pretends he doesn't know me, but he—or the fellow with him—they behave like gangsters!"

"They did seem to have some of the mannerisms," Simon admitted thoughtfully. "Are you absolutely certain you couldn't have been wrong?"

"Absolutely."

"After all those years, even a thing like a small scar—"

"I'm positive it was Cartelli, and still more so after hearing his voice. I used to tease him about sounding like a frog instead of a Caruso. No! It only shows you," said Mr. Euston, taking brooding refuge in one of the cardinal tenets of a true-blue Briton, "you never really know where you are with foreigners."

This line of thought was punctuated by the arrival of the lobster that Simon had been awaiting, mounted on a wheeled trolley, attended by a retinue of waiters, and trailing clouds of elysian fragrance. He made a hospitable gesture.

"Would you care to join me? We can share this while they fix another one."

Mr. Euston, however, seemed to feel that he had already shared more than enough confidences for such an informal acquaintance. He pushed his chair back and climbed hurriedly

to his feet.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Tombs, but I've already imposed on you too much. Besides, I don't think I could eat anything for a while." He pulled out his wallet and extracted a card. "If you're ever in London and I can do anything for you, please give me a ring. And again, thanks awfully for your help."

He pumped Simon's hand vigorously, turned, and marched firmly away and out of Simon's world for ever; and with a shrug Simon dismissed the encounter from his mind and devoted to the *aragosta* the whole-hearted attention which it deserved. Mr. Euston's enlargements on the theme of the nasty surprises which could befall anyone who ventured outside the counties and clans of Albion might have provided a fascinating accompaniment to lunch, but not so much that to be deprived of it would impair his appetite. As for the incident that had brought them together, Simon was still half inclined to write it off as a simple case of human error. The most interesting feature of it was that Euston had had the bad luck to pick on a character who had all the earmarks of having spent some time in the USA in associations which are not highly approved of by the Immigration Service.

That is, he thought so until the next morning.

Breakfasting in his room, he was trying to utilize the exercise of reading an Italian newspaper to divert his attention from the vile taste of the coffee, without much success in spite of the normal quota of international crises and local scandals. Until he reached a small item low down on the second page.

TURISTA INGLESE TROVATO ASSASSINATO, said the headline.

A silent relay closed in his brain, setting off a peal of soundless alarm bells in his inner ear, even before he came to the second paragraph, where the murdered man was identified as James Euston, of London.

A number of reasons have been suggested at different times for Simon Templar's superficially incongruous title of The Saint, and there may be a kernel of truth in all of them, while not one is the complete answer. The sobriquet is a derivative and outgrowth of so many contributory and contradictory factors attempting to crystallize the supreme paradox of the man himself. But one truly sanctified quality which had never been imputed to him was a forgiving disposition.

James Euston had never been his friend, and probably never could have been. With all his

possibly sterling virtues, Mr. Euston had the essential ingredients of a crashing bore. His demise would be no great loss to anyone, except perhaps his nearest kin, if he had any. And Simon had no personal obligation to protect him, beyond a basic civilized responsibility which he had already more than fulfilled. Yet by not taking the Englishman's earnestness seriously enough, and blithely ascribing the gangsterish reflexes of Not-Dino and his bully boy to an almost amusing coincidence, he had let Euston go bumbling off to a death which might easily have been averted. He had been made an accomplice, however unwittingly, in the slaughter of a harmless innocent; and even if his involvement had been unintentional, he could not forgive his own blindness. And therefore he could not forgive the men who had profited by it.

Which meant especially the one who must after all have been Dino Cartelli.

That at least was a viable assumption. In the light of what Simon had witnessed the day before, it seemed as if James Euston's vacation could only have been so violently terminated because he had identified Cartelli. If it had only been an accidental and unfounded resemblance, Euston would not have had to be killed. The newspaper, of course, gave robbery as the obvious motive. Euston's corpse, with its head beaten in and its clothing emptied of cash, had been found in an alley a few blocks from his hotel: it seemed self-evident that he had had the bad luck to be waylaid by footpads on his way home. And such a coincidence could not be ruled out—though all the Saint's instincts, belatedly sharpened as they had now become, rejected it with hoots of derision. To him, the aroma of double-distilled skullduggery had been unmistakably added to the other noisome and omniprevalent effluvia of Naples.

Simon settled on those conclusions while he showered and dressed, and when he walked out into the furnace blast of Neapolitan heat it was not for a sightseeing stroll.

It was still too early for lunch, a meal which in Italy never begins before one o'clock and when combined with a necessary nap to aid digestion of the *pasta* and *vino* can extend into the late afternoon. But at Le Arcate some torpid waiters were sweeping and dusting and setting out arrays of silver and napery in readiness for the activity to come. Without too much prompting, one of them was persuaded to retire to the gloomy back quarters in search of the head waiter.

In a soiled collarless shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and still in need of his first shave, this was a much less august personage than he appeared on duty, but he accepted the off-hour summons with professionally reserved aplomb. He shook hands easily when Simon extended his, and there was no change of expression when he felt the folded bill in his palm. The paper vanished with the dexterity of many such passings, and he tilted his head with grave attention to learn what small service had been purchased.

"If you remember, I had lunch here yesterday," Simon began.

"*Sissignore.* I remember."

"At the same time, there was a man here named Dino Cartelli."

"The man who sat down with you for a few minutes? I thought he was English."

"He was. I'm talking about another customer."

The head waiter's forehead wrinkled above a perfectly blank face.

"Cartelli? I do not know that name."

Unless the man was a consummate actor, he must have been telling the truth; and the Saint would usually back his own judgment against any modern electronic substitute. If it was not letting him down, then, Cartelli had not merely been reluctant to be recognized: he had a new name now and did not even want to be reminded of the old.

"An Italian," Simon said. "In a light gray suit. Heavy, almost bald, with a deep rough voice. He was sitting with a younger man at that table there."

This time he had even less need of a lie detector, as the man's eyes swivelled in the direction of the pointing finger and swivelled back again to focus on the Saint with a pronounced diminution of cordiality.

"I do not remember such a man, *signore.* You realize, Napoli is a big city, and this is a busy restaurant. It is impossible to know everyone. *Mi rincresce assai.*"

He escorted Simon to the door, multiplying his protestations of regret, but not saddened enough by his inability to help to be moved to refund the money that had already settled in his pocket.

He would need absolution for perjury before he partook of another Mass, but Simon realized that it would have been a waste of time to discuss this with him.

Outside, the doorman, not yet gorgeous in his coat of office, was stolidly sweeping the night's debris from the stretch of sidewalk over which he reigned. The Saint approached him and said: "Do you remember a man who was here for lunch yesterday—rather stout, bald, with a grating voice, in a gray suit?"

Folding money between Simon's fingertips promised gratitude in advance, and the doorman's hand started an automatic move towards it before the full import of the question drilled into his head. With comprehension came reaction, and his fingers jerked back as if from the touch of a hot iron. He glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, and a drowned-fish expression washed over his face.

"*Non mi ricordo,*" he gabbled. "We have so many customers, I forget all of them."

He returned to his sweeping with far more industrious concentration than he had shown before.

Simon looked where the doorman's eyes had swerved, and saw the head waiter still lurking in the doorway. With a shrug of resignation, he turned and strode away.

The visual impression that he had given up lasted only until he rounded the next corner. Then immediately his stride lengthened and quickened as he circled the block to approach the restaurant from the opposite side. This was somewhat easier begun than accomplished, for there are few such things as "blocks" in the American sense in any Italian city—there are only chunks and gobbets of buildings of all ages and stages of decrepitude, intersected by a completely haphazard network of streets and stairways that would seem to have been laid out by a jigsaw puzzle fan rather than a cartographer. Calling upon his sense of direction for a prodigious effort, the Saint managed to achieve his purpose with an accuracy which, in the Africa of H Rider Haggard, might have earned him the cognomen of Lord of the Labyrinths, or He-Who-Finds-All-Crooked-Paths. In a surprisingly short time he had completed the meandering detour and was leaning against the wall of the adjacent building, out of sight of anyone who did not step all the way out of the restaurant, as the doorman pushed his broom towards that side with the normal apathy which it had not taken long to restore.

"*Amico,*" said the Saint softly, "would you like to try your memory again?"

His voice froze the pavement sanitizer into immobility. Then, with painful slowness, the man's eyes travelled all the way up the Saint's figure from the shoes to the smiling face.

"Now don't go and have a stroke," Simon urged him kindly. "Nobody inside can see me, and they need never know I came back. Just prod those brain cells and try to make them give out the name of the gentleman I was asking about."

"*Non capisco,*" said the door-

man hoarsely, and resumed a pretense of sweeping that would scarcely have convinced a five-year-old microcephalic.

The axiom that money talks has its exceptions, but something told the Saint that he had found one individual who would not be permanently deaf to sufficient shouting. This time it was a 10,000-*lire* note that he produced and unfolded to the size of a small bedsheet; it shone goldenly in the sun. He refolded it to a small wad and let it drop. The doorman's eyes followed it covetously as it fell, until Simon's foot covered it.

"Do you understand that?" Simon asked. "It would be so easy for you to sweep it up."

"*No!*" was the mechanical answer, but the emphasis was dwindling.

"At least you might tell me somewhere else to ask. The hotel where he stays, perhaps. The driver of the taxi they took from here might have told me that, if I found the right driver. No one will know it was you."

Beads of sweat broke out on the man's swarthy face as fear fought with avarice. Simon took out a second 10,000-*lire* bill and folded it carefully like the first.

"*Excelsior!*" gasped the doorman huskily.

Simon gazed at him for a long moment, and, when the man failed to unfurl a banner with a strange device and head for the nearest mountain, it became clear that the speaker was not planning to emulate the eccentric youth in the poem but was simply uttering the name of the plushest hotel in Naples.

"*Grazie,*" said the Saint, releasing the second bill, and turned away without waiting to watch it and its predecessor being raked briskly into the little pile of jetsam that the *portinaio* had been maneuvering towards the frontage of the establishment next door.

To some investors it might have seemed an inadequate yield for the outlay, since it would not have taken any Sherlock Holmes to deduce that a citizen dressed and bedecked like Cartelli would not be likely to bunk in some obscure *pensione;* but to the Saint it was worth it for the time that could be saved from canvassing alternative *palazzi*—not to mention eliminating the possibility that he resided in an apartment or house of his own. Now, provided the information was true, Simon could make a more positive move.

A green and black cab followed after him when he turned into the Via A Falcone, while the driver expounded the advantages of his cool upholstery and dazzling speed over the dusty travail of walking under the noonday sun. Simon succumbed with

only token resistance and climbed in, but he was not so blinded by the shady interior that he failed to notice the 300 *lire* already registered on the meter, nor too proud to draw the driver's attention to the undoubted oversight. After a brief verbal brannigan during which certain special charges were mentioned, so special indeed that they could not be found in the quadrilingual list of complicated tariffs posted inside the cab, a decision was reached that perhaps the meter should be readjusted; and the chauffeur launched his vehicle through the lunatic traffic with an emotional abandon which suggested that only homicide or suicide would salve his injured feelings.

Simon called a premature halt to the ride at a leather-goods shop which he spotted within sight of the Hotel Excelsior. There he bought a handsome gold-bound pigskin cigar case, making no more attempt to stint on quality than a man with his quarry's evident tastes would have done. To him it was only another investment, like the solvent which had opened the doorman's impermanently sealed lips.

He took the case and the same attitude to the *Sale e Tabacci* a few doors farther on. On some occasion it might have amused him to engage the tobacconist in a long and profound debate over the selection of a package of salt, which for reasons which may remain eternally obscure to non-Italians is a monopoly of the same government-licensed stores. But that morning he was driven by too much impatience to waste time on anything but the purchase of two of the very best cigars, and the shopkeeper who sold them at the inflated official price never knew what torment he had been spared.

Simon put the cigars in the case and kept the case in his hand as he entered the ornate lobby of the Excelsior, and located the desk of the concierge.

"I believe this belongs to one of your guests," he said. "Would you see that he gets it?"

The attendant examined the case which Simon had laid on the counter, with the olympian detachment befitting his office, which is believed by all concierges to be only slightly inferior to that of the managing director.

"Do you know which one?" he inquired, with a subtle suggestion that his responsibility covered not merely thousands but tens of thousands, and that anyone who did not realize it was probably a peasant.

Simon shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't. I just happened to see him getting into a cab, and heard him tell the driver to come here, and then I saw the case on the ground. I

picked it up and yelled at him, but the cab was driving off and he didn't hear."

"What did he look like?"

"Heavy set — about sixty — a little gray hair, but mostly bald — wearing a very fancy gray silk suit — diamond pin in his tie — star sapphire cuff-links — a gold ring with a huge emerald . . ."

The functionary, who like all his brethren of that unique European order could be counted on to know everyone who had had a room in the caravanserai during his tenure, and almost as much about their activities as God, listened with a concentration that progressed from the condescendingly labored to the tentatively perspicacious to the final flash of connection.

"Ah, yes! I think you mean Signore Destamio."

The Saint's pause was imperceptible.

"Not—Carlo Destamio?"

"No. The name is Alessandro Destamio." The case disappeared under the counter. "I will take care of it for him."

"Now, just a minute," Simon said amiably. "Why not call his room and ask if he did lose a cigar case? I didn't actually *see* him drop it, you know. It might have been lying there all the time."

"I cannot ask him at once, sir. He left yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, did he? Simon did not bat an eyelid. "That's too bad. It was yesterday when I picked it up, of course, but I've been too busy to come by before this. Where did he go?"

"He did not tell me, sir."

"Then how will you ask him?"

It was apparent that the concierge did not warm to that type of interrogation, from the darkening of his face which was quickly masked with a sneer.

"I will ask him when he comes back, sir. He is not a tourist—he keeps his suite here all the time. If you would like to leave your name and address, I will send you back the case if it does not belong to him."

And, the impeccable manner implied, if there's any question of a reward, don't worry, I'll see that you get it; you probably need it.

"Don't bother," said the Saint airily. "If it turns out not to be his, you keep it. Just be careful how you light the cigars, in case some practical joker planted the whole thing."

It was not, he felt, an entirely discreditable exit; and it left interesting vistas for future speculation.

Besides which, the visit had produced all that he had any right to expect, if not more: a name.

Alessandro Destamio.

A hard core of literate Ameri-

cans who can still read the printed word when they get their eyes ungummed from the nearest television set would be capable of distinguishing the name of Alessandro Destamio from all the synonyms who have gone down in windrows before the movie cameras. It was a name that had become familiar through much repetition in news reports and popular articles, even to a vast number of people who still had only the vaguest idea of what he actually did. Al Destamio was a member of "The Syndicate", a nebulous and to most readers still semi-mythical organization which controlled all the lucrative rackets in the United States and a shocking percentage of local politicians. He had not been one of its chief executives, at the rarified elevation of a Luciano or a Costello, but he was at least what might be called a minor cabinet minister — one of those names which can be regularly flagellated by columnists without fear of libel suits, which are intermittently rousted by federal officers, and which nevertheless appear seldom or never on a roster of penitentiary inmates, and when they do it is usually because of some technical flaw in their income tax returns.

Al Destamio, Simon clearly recalled, had been one of those unlucky ones a few years before, and had been deported back to his native land after a year's cure in Leavenworth which only cost the US Government a few thousand dollars more than he was already alleged to have short-changed them.

And yet, back here at home, he was apparently suffering from no shortage of pin-money, and his aura could still inspire terror or loyal compliance among restaurant and hotel employees. An unappreciative Uncle Sam might have given Alessandro the boot, but back in his homeland he was manifestly not washed up. Far from it. In fact, he seemed to command a respect which might have been envied by the Prodigal Son.

At this point the Saint felt that some reliable local briefing on such mysteries might be helpful. Unfortunately there was not a single resident of that city in his slim but strategically indexed address book. Then he recollected that his old friend Giulio Trapani kept a villa at Sorrento, which couldn't be more than a couple of hours away, to which he retreated for a vacation every summer. Simon could find nothing in the telephone book which he consulted in his garage, and decided at once that it would be faster to drive there and conduct inquiries on the spot than to do battle with the Information Service of the Italian telephone system. In

less time than he could have initiated a phone call, he was in his car and heading for the famous Amalfi Drive.

But in this case it made no difference. He was able to track down the villa without too much trouble, but *il padrone* had not yet arrived. No doubt he was still skimming the cream of the expense-account crop in the Thames Valley. And good luck to him — but Simon wished only gastritis on the beneficiaries.

He lunched regally on *zuppa di pesce* and *calamaretti,* laved with a bottle of Antinori Classico, on the terrace of La Minervetta overlooking the blinding blue sea, and later swam off the rocks below in the same translucent element, and finally drove back to Naples refreshed and recharged but no wiser than he had been when he left.

Thanks to the recommendation of a well-meaning friend, the Saint had made his reservation at a more modest hotel than the Excelsior, a short distance farther along the sea front on the Via Partenope. It had turned out to be considerably less luxurious than the class of hostelry which Simon Templar usually chose at that period of his life; but it had been late at night when he arrived, and his room looked clean and comfortable enough, and it had not seemed worth the trouble to go searching for other accomodations for the two or three days which were all he had planned to stay. Its only vital disadvantage as against the more populous and busily serviced competition was one which had not occurred to him at the time and might never have been brought home to him if he had not impulsively befriended the late Mr. Euston.

He helped himself to his key from behind the all-purpose desk which was tended at various hours by the Manageress, the porter, the floor waiter, or any chambermaid who was not otherwise occupied, and in between their shifts by a bell with a mechanical button which could be thumped for eventual attention, and took the self-service elevator to his floor. He had just stepped out when a man came running down the corridor in a frantic sprint to catch a ride before the conveyance went down again; and the Saint turned and stared at him with instant curiosity.

Readers of this chronicle who wonder why a man running for a lift should be such an arresting spectacle are only betraying their own limited horizons. If they had taken advantage of the eight-country, twenty-two city, fifteen-day excursion rates offered by the philantropic airlines, they would know that on the Mediterranean littoral, in sum-

mer, nobody, but nobody, runs for an elevator or anything else. Wherefore the Saint took extra note of the pointed face, the rodent teeth, the pencil-line mustache, the awning-striped suit, and a wealth of other trivia not worth recording, before the febrile eccentric squeezed into the lazy-box and disappeared from view.

It had all taken perhaps three seconds, and it was over before a possible significance to the incident could penetrate through his first superficial astonishment. And by the time Simon reached his room, further speculation became unnecessary.

The door was not quite shut, and he only used his key to push it open.

To say that the room had been searched would be rather like describing a hurricane as a stiff breeze; and in fact a hurricane could have gone through it without doing much more damage. Whoever had been there—and Simon no longer had any doubt that it had been the rat-faced man in a hurry—had efficiently and enthusiastically taken it to pieces. Not content with spilling everything from drawers and suitcases, the intruder had hacked open the shoulders and split the seams of some of the finest tailoring of Savile Row. The same blade had slit the linings of valises and playfully pried the heels from shoes, besides exposing the stuffing of the mattress.

Only a person who knew the Saint's fastidious habits would have appreciated the calm with which he surveyed the wreckage and flicked the dead ash from his cigarette on to the midden heap before him.

"*Che cosa fa?*" gasped a voice behind him, and he turned and saw a gaping chambermaid staring in from the corridor.

"If someone stayed on the job downstairs, it might not have happened," he said coldly. "Please get it cleaned up. The clothes that are worth repairing you can give to your husband, or your lover, wherever they will do the most good. And if the manager has any comments, he can find me in the bar."

Fortunately there was Peter Dawson in that dispensary, and a double measure with plenty of ice and just a little water helped to soothe the most savage edge of his anger as well as slacking the thirst which he had incubated on the drive back.

The vandalizing of his wardrobe was only a temporary inconvenience, after all: a telegram to Anderson & Sheppard would have replacements under way at once, and meanwhile there were excellent tailors in Italy and some of the world's best shoemakers. On the plus side, the last vestige of possibility

that Euston's death was coincidental had been removed. And Cartelli, or Destamio, had been concerned enough about Simon Templar's intervention to have ordered a complete check-up on him and a search which could only have had the object of discovering any concealed official— or criminal— association.

A revelation that might have daunted anyone but the Saint was the speed and apparent ease with which he had been found, which indicated an organization of impressive size and competence. He seriously doubted whether even the local police, with all their authority and facilities, could have done as well. But a sober respect for the opposition and the odds had never done anything to Simon Templar except to make the game seem more exciting.

The manager, or the husband of the manageress, eventually made an appearance. He dutifully wrung his hands over the catastrophe, and then said: "You are worried, of course, about the damage done to the bed. Do not think any more about it. I have put in a new bed, and we will just charge it in the bill."

"How nice of you," said the Saint. "I hate to sound ungracious, but as a matter of fact I was more worried about the damage to my belongings, which happened because you make it so easy for robbers to get into the rooms."

The manager's hands, shoulders, and eyebrows spread out simultaneously in a graphic explosion of incredulity, indignation, reproach, and dismay.

"But, *signore*, I am not responsible if you have friends who perhaps do such things for a bad joke!"

"You have an argument there," Simon conceded. "So it might be simpler not to give me a bill at all. Otherwise I might recommend some other playful friends to come here, and they might do the same things in all your rooms." He turned over the bar check. "Oh, and thanks for the drink."

He felt better for the rest of the evening; though he was careful to dine at a corner table and to examine his wine bottle carefully before it was uncorked. The fact that some back-stage Borgia might have spiked anything he ate was a risk he had to take; but in calculating it he had noted that for some abstruse reason poison had never been an accepted weapon of the fraternity of which Al Destamio was such a distingushed member. Simon had often wondered why. It would have seemed so much easier and slicker than the technique of the gun. He had never been able to decide whether the answer was in some code of

twisted chivalry, calling for the actual confrontation of the enemy before his extinction, or merely because a spectacular artillery mow-down made more awesome headlines with which to keep other hesitants in line.

But nothing even mildly disturbing happened to him that night, and when the next move came in the morning it was totally different from anything he had anticipated.

When he came downstairs after breakfast and handed his key over the desk, a slight saturnine man in chauffeur's uniform who had been standing near by approached him with a deferential bow.

"Excuse me, sir," he said in passable English. "Mr. Destamio would like to meet you, and sent me with his car. He did not want to risk waking you up by telephoning, so I was told to wait here until you came down."

The Saint regarded him expressionlessly.

"And suppose I had some other plans?" he said. "Such as going shopping for some new clothes, for instance?"

"Mr. Destamio hoped you would talk to him before you do anything else," said the chauffeur, with equal inscrutability. "He told me to promise you will not be sorry. The car is outside. Will you come?"

A latinate flip of the hand repeated both the invitation and the direction; and yet no threat was implied by gesture, intonation, or innuendo. Having delivered his message, the chauffeur waited without a sign of impatience for Simon to make his own decision.

Well, Simon thought, some day he would almost inevitably have to guess wrong, fatally wrong. But he didn't think this was the day. And anyhow, the opportunity of making a proper acquaintance with such a personage as Mr. Destamio was too great a temptation to resist.

"Okay," he said recklessly. I'll take a chance."

He did not have to look around for the car. There was a Cadillac berthed in the street outside which was the only conceivable vehicle, even before the chauffeur opened the door with a certain possessive pride. It was black, high-finned, gigantic, polished to the brilliance of a jewel, and completely out of place in the constricted antiquity of the street. Without hesitation Simon climbed into the cavernous interior, and was not surprised to find himself alone. Whatever Destamio might have in mind for the future, he would hardly be so idiotic as to have the Saint killed in his own car in the center of Naples. The windows were closed and an air conditioner whispered softly. Simon settled

back into the deep upholstery and prepared to enjoy the ride.

It was not a very long journey, but it was impressive enough. Under the driver's skillful touch, the car slid into the traffic like a Leviathan into the deep. On all sides rushed schools of tiny cars, battling and honking through swarms of slow-moving pedestrians, small children, and animals. The din that arose from all this came to Simon only as the gentlest of murmurs through the thick glass and padded metal. Cool breezes laved him and wafted away his cigarette smoke even as he exhaled it.

Leviathan ploughed a majestic path through the small fry and rushed towards the bay. Without slowing, they swept through the gates of the port, and the guards saluted respectfully. The Saint looked out at the portholed flanks of the ships—only liners here, the smaller ferries were outside the fence in the public port—and had momentary qualms of a shanghaiing, until the car came to a smooth halt next to a modernistic concrete structure something like a giant's pool table on spindly legs. It had been built since his last visit to the city, and for a few seconds it puzzled him. Then he heard the roar of rotors overhead, and the pieces clicked into place.

"Ischia or Capri?" he asked the chauffeur, as he stepped reluctantly out into the steam-bath of untreated atmosphere.

"Capri, sir. This way, please."

The two island resorts of fun and sun are eighteen miles from the city, at the outer edge of the vast bay. They are normally reached by a varied collection of yachts, ferries, and converted fishing boats, in a voyage that takes from one to four hours depending on the prospective passenger's ability to translate the misleading notices. Prosperity and technology have now changed this for the well-heeled few and supplied a helicopter service that covers the same distance in a few minutes. There was one that seemed to have been waiting only for the Saint: as soon as he was on board, the door shut and he was lifted as smoothly as in an elevator.

They swung out over the incredibly blue waters of the bay, giving him what he had to admit was a marvelous panorama, much as he thought it had been over-written in the travel brochures. The vertical rock walls of Capri jutting dramatically from the sea were as impressive from the air as when seen from the more usual approach. The pilot turned in over Marina Grande, circled the top of Monte Solaro so that his passenger could appreciate the best parts of the view, then dropped lightly

on to the painted circle of the heliport.

This is located on the site of Damecuta, one of the many palaces which the Emperor Tiberius scattered over his favorite island, on the cliff edge just as far out of town as it is possible to get on dry land, and as Simon climbed down he wondered what transportation would be provided for the last lap of the journey. He felt sure it would be no less sumptuous than the preceding conveyances.

Something appeared wearing the minimal shorts and halter which pass for clothing on that insular lido, and the Saint leisurely surveyed the large areas of skin which they made no attempt to cover, confident in the wisdom of his years that people who undressed like that expected to be looked at. The vision of long tanned legs and golden hair floated towards him with a rotary motion that displayed its other accessories to great effect. "Mr. Templar?" it asked, in a low and throbbingly warm voice.

"None other," he said happily. "How did you find me in all this crowd?"

The helicopter pilot and a single airport attendant—the only audience—watched appreciatively, waiting for the reverse view when the vision would retreat and in so doing display the remainder of her delectable curves. She ignored the Saint's pleasantry and merely gestured towards the parking space.

Since the roads on Capri are barely wide enough for two beamy baby-buggies to brush past each other, only the smallest cars are used and even the buses are minuscule. Therefore he was not expecting another Cadillac; but the little cream-colored Alfa-Romeo which he boarded, with its sensationally displayed chaffeuse, was a worthy substitute.

So was her driving style, which shot it off like a compact bomb and forced it to claw its way around the turns that wound up the face of the mountain with an abandon which made the Saint hope devoutly that she knew what she was doing. He stole several dubious glances at her; but her lips were heavily painted and unmoving, while the upper part of her face was so hidden by immense flower-wreathed sunglasses that her eyes and any expression around them were completely concealed. Her attention seemed to concentrate entirely on the road; and Simon felt too gentlemanly at the time to force his attentions on her. Particularly since they were skirting the edge of vertical drops so high that the boats below looked like toys in a pond.

Fortunately for his nervous stamina, there was quite a short limit to the maximum mileage at

her disposal on the island, and she had not even reached third gear when they arrived at their destination, a villa overlooking the beaches and coves of Marina Piccola.

His alertness involuntarily tautened again as he strolled up the flagged path. Now he had helped to deliver himself unresistingly exactly where Destamio wanted him, it would not be much longer before he was shown just how foolhardy he had been. He was not even ashamed to be relieved when the vision with the legs rang the door-bell herself, thus sparing him any concern over the perils of the bell mechanism. More than once in the past it had been demonstrated to him how lethal such commonplace fixtures could be made. But this time the button activated no poisoned needles, sprays of gas, hidden guns, or bombs; if anything, the opening of the door was quite anticlimactic. Instead of unleashing mayhem, it projected only the prominent belly of Signore Destamio, dressed in a cerise shirt and purple shorts which did considerably less for his pear-shaped figure than the fancy tailoring in which Simon had first seen him.

"Well, Mr. Templar! Nice of you to come," the remembered voice rasped. Destamio put out his hand and drew Simon into the house. "I been wanting to talk to you, and I figured this spot was as good as any, better than most. Right?"

"It could be," said the Saint guardedly.

He was observing all the corners and interesting angles of the interior without appearing to do so. But there were no other thugs in sight, and the situation looked transparently innocuous so far.

"Come on and let's sit out on the balcony, nice and cool with a great view, and Lily is gonna bring us some drinks and then she'll get lost."

If Lily took offense at this rude dismissal she gave no sign of it. As soon as Destamio and the Saint were settled on either side of a glass and wrought-iron table she wheeled up a bar wagon and left. Simon heard a door close deep inside the house.

"Help yourself," Destamio said. "And pour me a brandy and ginger ale while you're there."

As Simon selected two clean glasses and a bottle, he admired the neat and tactful way in which anxiety about a possibly-doctored drink had been eliminated. Nevertheless, he took the extra precaution of pouring both drinks from the same bottle. The cognac was Jules Robin, he noted approvingly, though he would not normally have chosen to drink it before lunch.

"You by any chance working

for those bastards at the Bureau of Internal Revenue these days, Saint?" Destamio asked, with no change in his conversational tone.

He stared fixedly at Simon as he spoke and afterwards, his expression controlledly empty, yet not completely hiding glints of menace deep within the eyes.

The Saint sipped his drink and was externally just as calm—while his brain was whirring like an IBM machine. The mention of the income tax department nudged out a file card that had been waiting for hours to drop into the hopper.

"Gopher," he said dreamily. "Gopher Destamio — isn't that what they called you?"

"My friends call me Al," growled the other. "And that's what I wanna know about you: whose side you on?"

"Do I have to take sides? drawled the Saint. "I hate paying taxes as much as anyone, so I can't help having a sort of sneaking sympathy for anyone who's had your kind of trouble with the Internal Revenue Service. But tax evasion isn't the worst crime you've been accused of, is it?"

"You heard all about me, then."

Al "Gopher" Destamio pulled from his pocket a wilted package from which he extracted an object that might be humorously described as a cigar, but in fact resembled nothing so much as a piece of decomposing rope that had been soaked in tar and buried for a number of years. He sawed the thing in two with a pocket-knife and offered the Saint half of it. Simon shook his head politely, and watched in fascination as Destamio pulled a yellowed straw from the interior of one half and applied a lighted match to the truncated end. After warming it thoroughly, he raised the revolting article to his lips and proceeded to puff it to life. Simon moved his chair back a bit, out of the direct drift of the smoke, having had previous experience of the asphyxiating potency of the infamous Tuscan cheroot.

"Everyone's heard all about me," Destamio said, apparently unconscious of the destructive effect of the fumes on throat and lungs. "That's the trouble. They believe all them lies printed in the papers, and think I got no more rights than a mad dog. Me, I'm a peaceful man. I just wanna be let alone."

"I guess none of the other guys in the Syndicate wants much more than that," Simon agreed commiseratingly.

"Lies, all lies," Destamio grumbled without much show of heat.

He went on in a monotone, as if reciting a story that had been told too many times, to reporters,

police officers, and the more inquisitive members of the judiciary: "I go from Italy to the States with a few bucks and invest it in the trucking business, and I make a little dough. I make a little dough because I like playing the ponies, and I'm lucky. So maybe I make a mistake not reporting some of my winnings, and they make out I got more money than I can account for earning. It's discrimination, that's what it is. Just because I'm Italian and some guys in the rackets are Italian, they call me a racketeer. I love America, but they give me a dirty deal."

The record ground to a halt, and Destamio lowered the level of liquid in his glass by a full inch.

Simon recalled the rest of the story now, including some details that Gopher Destamio had neglected to include. The early record was vague, but included two or three arrests on minor charges and a short term spent in jail for assault with a deadly weapon before Destamio had graduated to the upper ranks of the Syndicate. Thereafter his presence had been reported at mysterious assemblies in remote mountain cabins, and his name regularly cropped up in popular magazine articles about the unpunished aristocracy of the underworld. Although, like others similarly mentioned, he exhibited extraordinary restraint in not suing such caluminators for libel, no one seemed able to prove anything positive against him until the accountants of the Justice Department found enough discrepancies in his financial records to build a case around.

The legal duels that followed were expensive both for the Government and for Gopher, and as usual only the lawyers showed a profit. Uncle Sam was able to lay hands on less than a tenth of the amounts claimed for liabilities and penalties, and could only retaliate by depriving Destamio of his newly acquired citizenship and deporting him back to the land of his birth. What Italy thought about this was not reported, and indeed the Italians never seemed to have asked if they wanted him.

"So you know all about me, Saint," Destamio said. "And I know a lot about you. What I don't know is why you get so interested in me all at once. Why?"

The question was thrown in a conversational, almost offhand manner. But Simon knew this was the bonger, the $64,000 question, the whole and sole reason why he had been brought there with such ambiguous courtesy. Many things might hang upon his reply, among them perhaps the further duration of his own life.

Yet the Saint seemed even more casual and indifferent than his host, and the hand holding his cigarette was so steady that the smoke rose in an unwavering column through the still air. He answered truthfully as well, having decided a little while ago that that would be the most uncomplicated and productive policy. Also he wanted Destamio"s reaction when a certain name was mentioned again.

"I'm still wondering," he said, "what happened to Dino Cartelli."

II. How Al Destamio made a bid, and Marco Ponti told Stories.

If the Saint had expected some pyrotechnically dramatic response, he would have been disappointed. Either the name meant nothing to Destamio, or he had been waiting for the question and knew in advance how he would field it. The racketeer only grunted and shook his head.

"Cartelli? Don't know him. Why ask me? What makes you so nosey about me, anyhow? All the time I get reports how you're asking questions about me. A man in my position don't like that. Lotta people would like to see me in trouble, and I gotta take precautions."

"Like having my clothes cut up?" Simon inquired icily.

Destamio grunted again—a porcine reflex that seemed to be his opening gambit to all conversation.

"Maybe. Some guys get too nosey, they get worse than that cut up. You ain't answered my question: why should I know about this Cartelli?"

"Because that's what a man called you at the Arcate the other night. He seemed very certain that you were Dino Cartelli. I heard him."

Simon waited for the grunt, and it was more explosive than ever.

"Is that all you got on your mind? The guy was nuts. The world's full of nuts." Destamio snapped his fingers and squinted at the Saint. "Say—now I recognize you! You were the guy at the next table who gave Rocco the squeeze. I didn't recognize you till now. I pulled out because I try to stay outa trouble here. I got enough trouble." He sat back and chewed the black and dreadful stump of his cigar, staring at the Saint with piggy eyes. "You swear that's all the interest you got in my affairs? Because some nut calls me by a wrong name?"

"That's all," Simon told him calmly. "Because this nut, as you call him, was murdered that night. So he may have known

something that would make a lot more trouble for you."

For a long silent moment Destamio rolled the cigar between his fingers, glaring coldly at the Saint.

"And you think I bumped him to shut him up," he said finally. He flicked ashes over the balcony rail, towards the sea far below, and suddenly laughed. "Hell, is that all? You know, Saint, I believe you. Maybe I'm nuts, but I believe you. So you thought you had to do something to get justice for that poor dope! What's your first name—Simon? Call me Al, Simon—all my friends call me Al. And pour us another drink."

He was relaxed now, almost genial in a crude way.

"Then your name never was Dino Cartelli?" Simon persisted, obviously unimpressed by the other's abrupt change of manner.

"Never was and never will be. And I didn't knock that nut off, neither. You let a coincidence make a sucker outa you. Here, let me show you something."

Destamio heaved himself up and led the way back into the living room. He pointed to what at first appeared to be a decorative panel on the wall.

"Lotta bums go to the States change their names and don't care, because their names never meant nothing. But I'm Alessandro Leonardo Destamio and I'm proud of it. My family goes as far back as they ever had names, and I think the old king was an eighty-second cousin or something. Look for yourself!"

Simon realized that the panel was a genealogical chart complete with coats of arms and many branchings and linkings. The scrolls of names climbed and intertwined like cognominal foliage on a flowering tree of which the final fruit bore the glorious label of Lorenzo Michele Destamio.

"That was my papa. He was always proud of the family. And there's my birth certificate."

Destamio stabbed a thick thumb at another frame which held a beribboned and sealing-waxed document which proclaimed that the offspring of Lorenzo Michele Destamio would go though life hailed as Alessandro Leonardo. It looked authentic enough — as a document.

"And you've no idea why this man, what was his name—William Charing-Cross—should have been killed?" Simon asked.

"No idea," Destamio said blandly. "I never saw him before. Wouldn't have known his name unless you told me. But if you're worried about him, I can ask a few questions around. Find out if anyone knows anything. Anything to make you happy . . .

Hey!" He snapped his fingers as he was reminded of something else. "I was forgetting what the boys did. Be right back."

He walked into an adjoining room, and after a while Simon heard the unmistakable thunk of a safe door closing. Destamio came back with a thick wad of currency in his hand.

"Here," he said, holding it out. "Some guys working here get too enthusiastic. That wasn't my idea, all they did to your stuff. So take this and buy some more. If it ain't enough, let me know."

Simon took the offering. On top of the stack was an American hundred-dollar bill, and when he flicked his finger across the edges other hundreds flashed by in a twinkling parade of zeros.

"Thank you," he said without shame, and put the money in his pocket.

Destamio smiled benevolently, and chewed another half-inch from his mangled cigar.

"Let's eat," he said, waving a pudgy hand towards a table already decked with silver and crystal in another alcove. "And we can talk about things. A guy can go crazy here with no one to talk to."

He sat down and shook a small hand bell noisily, and the service began even before the ornamental Lily arrived to join them.

Al Destamio did most of the talking, and Simon Templar was quite content to listen. Whatever Lily's other talents might have been, aside from her hair-raising ways with a car, they were obivously not conversational. She applied herself to the food with a ravenous concentration which proved that her svelte figure could only be a metabolic miracle; and Simon had to summon some self-control not to emulate her, for in spite of his grossness Destamio employed an exceptional cook.

There was only one topic of conversation, or monologue to describe it more accurately, and that was the depravity of the US Department of Justice and its vicious persecution of innocent immigrants who succeeded in rising above the status of common laborers. But about all that Destamio revealed of himself was his remarkably mastery of the ramifications of the income tax laws, which seemed a trifle inconsistent with his claim to have only violated them through well-meaning ignorance. Simon was not called upon to do more than eat, drink, and occasionally make some lifelike sounds to show that he was paying attention, since the oracle was clearly entranced enough with the gargled splendor of his own voice.

Hence the Saint was able to disguise an occasional unfocussing of the eyes, when his mind

wandered underneath the monotonous discourse, groping for another missing item of information which he felt might provide a key to some of the riddles of the past two days, but which kept eluding him as exasperatingly as an itch that could not be scratched.

At last the coffee wound up the repast, and Destamio yawned and belched and announced his readiness for a siesta. Simon took this as his cue for an exit, and was given no argument.

"Glad I could get to know you, Saint," Destamio said, pumping his hand with the heartiness of a professional politician. "You have any more problems, you come to me. Don't try to be a big shot by yourself."

The incredibly discreet Lily appeared once more in the role of chauffeuse, now wearing a cashmere sweater and Capri pants so tight that if she had been tattooed the mark would have shown through. Simon was delighted to observe that she was not tattooed.

As she resumed her attempts to make the Alfa-Romeo behave like a scared mountain goat, he felt that he had to make one parting effort to discover whether she ever talked at all.

"Do you live here or are you just visiting?" he queried chattily.

"Yes."

He gazed at her for quite a long time, figuring this out, but what could be seen of her face gave him no help. He decided to try again.

"Do you ever get away?"

"Sometimes."

That was a little better. Perhaps it only required perserverance.

"I hope I'll see you again somewhere."

"Why?"

"I'd like to know what your face looks like. Would I recognize you without glasses?"

"No."

Always the same pulse-stirring voice, vibrantly disinterested in everything.

"Is Al a jealous type?"

"I don't know."

The Saint sighed. Perhaps after all his charm was not absolutely irresistible. It was a solemn thought. At any rate, she was evidently capable of holding out for the duration of the short ride to the heliport. But he had to keep on talking, because the other haunting hint of knowledge that he had been seeking had suddenly given up its evasive tactics and dropped out of the recess where it had been hiding.

"Do you know why he was called 'Gopher'?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, I won't burden your mind with it. When you go back, just tell him that I know. I sud-

denly remembered. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

They were at the heliport, and a flight was about to leave, the vanes of the 'copter swishing lazily around. But the Saint wanted to be sure that his message would get through. As he levered himself out of the bucket seat, he stopped with the door still open and pulled out the sheaf of crisp greenery that Destamio had given him, fanning the leaves under her nose while he ostentatiously peeled off one of them.

"Tell him I liked these samples. The only thing wrong is, there weren't enough of them. Show him this so he knows what you're talking about. Tell him it's going to cost a lot more now, because of that 'Gopher' business. Do you think you'll get that straight?"

She nodded placidly.

"Congratulations," said the Saint.

He shut the car door, and leaned over it. There was one final touch he could not forego, vain as it might seem. Although it should certainly help to make his point.

"And if you want to find out whether he's jealous, tell him I did this," he said.

He bent further and kissed her on the lips. They tasted like warm paint.

The helicopter leaped skyward, and Simon's spirits soared with it. What had begun as the most trivial happenstance, sharpened by a curt sequel in the newspaper, had grown into the adumbration of a full-scale intrigue.

He had some of the sensations of an angler who was expecting to play with a sardine and instead has hooked a tuna. What he would do with the tuna on such a flimsy thread was something else again; and no one but Simon Templar would have made such a point of setting the barb so solidly. But it was one of the elementary tricks of fishing to make the fish work for you, and the Saint felt cheerfully confident that his fish would not waste much time sulking on the bottom. As soon as the 'Gopher' barb sank in . . .

To share that optimism, some readers may have to overcome the limitations of a sheltered life, and be informed of its connotations in some circles where they may not ordinarily revolve. In some of the far-fetched variations of American slang, a gopher (aside from his primitive zoological determination to be a small rodent of retiring but horticulturally destructive habits) can also be a bumpkin, a ruffian, or a toady. These are general terms, not confined to the so-called "underworld" with which

Destamio must have had some illustrious connections. But in the idiom of that nether clique, a 'gopher' is either an iron or steel safe, or the technician who specializes in blowing open such containers in order to obtain illegal possession of their contents.

This was the idiomatic detail which gave the lie to everything Destamio had tried to sell him, and which had to connect with the sudden demise of James Euston, Esquire, a former bank clerk. And the certainty of it added no little brilliance to Simon's esthetic appreciation of the golden afternoon clouds gathering behind Ischia.

When the helicopter landed at the Naples harbor station, he remained in his seat until the pilot came and said courteously: "This is the destination of your ticket, *signore.*"

"I've decided to go on to Capodichino."

"Then there is an extra charge."

"How much?" Simon asked carelessly.

He was not nearly so concerned about being branded an arrogant plutocrat, which he could survive, as about being caught in an even swifter riposte by Al Destamio, which he might not. Even in the few minutes for which he had been airborne, Lily could have returned to the villa, Destamio could have picked up a telephone and contacted henchmen on the mainland, and the Naples heliport might be no safer than a booby-trapped quagmire.

On the other hand, an arrival at Capodichino might confuse the Ungodly still more, and possibly leave them standing flat-footed.

Once he had decided on that detour, Simon realized that he had no need to return to Naples at all. His baggage had been rendered practically worthless anyhow, and from a phone booth at the airport he promised to come back later for whatever was worth salvaging. There was anguished disbelief in the manager's voice when Simon guaranteed that he would take care of the bill at the same time; but the Saint allowed his heart to be hardened by the thought of how much more joyfully surprised that entrepreneur would be when the payment actually arrived.

A kiosk sold him a book about the glories of Sicily, after some argument, for very little more than the price printed on the cover, and left him just enough time to catch the evening plane to Palermo.

Palermo was even hotter than Naples, and there are few air-conditioned hotel rooms in

Sicily, despite the suffocating need for them; but by a combination of seasoned instinct, determination, good luck, and extravagant bribery, the Saint succeeded in securing one. This involved staying at a hotel with the hideously inappropriate name of The Jolly, which was anything but. However, it gave him a restful night, and he was able to console himself for the cost with the reflection that it only made a small dent in Al Destamio's advance donation.

In the morning, after a leisurely breakfast, a shave with a cut-throat razor borrowed from the valet, and in relatively clean and spruce linen by courtesy of the ingenious manufacturers of wash-and-wear synthetics, he strolled over to the local office of the City & Continental Bank (Foreign Division) Limited, to which the hotel porter had only been able to direct him after his memory was refreshed by a reasonable honorarium. In fact it was such a modest building, evidently maintained principally as a convenience for touring clients, that there was barely room for its impressive name to spread across the frontage.

A dark-haired girl with Botticelli eyes smiled up at him from behind the counter and asked what she could do for him, and it required some discipline not to give her a truthful answer.

"I'm trying to contact one of your employees," he said. "It's several years since he worked here, so he may have been transferred."

"And his name?"

"Dino Cartelli."

"*Madre mia!*" the girl gasped, rolling her doe eyes and turning pale. "One moment —"

She went over and spoke to a man working at another desk, who dropped his pen without even noticing the splotch of ink it made on his ledger. He gave Simon a startled suspicious look, and hurried behind a partition at the rear of the office. In another minute he came back to the Saint.

"Would you like to speak to the manager, sir?"

Simon wanted nothing more. He followed the clerk to the inner sanctum, where he was left to repeat his question, feeling rather like the man in the Parisian story who has a note in French that no one will read to him. This time the reaction was less exaggerated, except for the altitude to which it raised the manager's eyebrows.

"Did you know Dino Cartelli well, sir?"

"I never even met him," Simon admitted cheerfully. "An old friend of his, James Euston, whom you might remember, told me to look him up

when I was in Sicily."

"Ah. Yes. Mr. Euston. Perhaps that explains it."

The manager stared gloomily at his hands folded on the desk. He was a very old man, with wispy gray hair and a face that had almost abdicated in favor of his skull.

"That was so long ago," he said. "He couldn't have known."

"*What* couldn't who have known?" Simon demanded, feeling more and more like the man with the mysterious note.

"Dino Cartelli is dead. Heroically dead," said the manager, in the professionally hushed voice of an undertaker.

"How did he do that?"

"It happened one night in the winter of 1949. A tragic night I shall never forget. Dino was alone in the bank, working late, getting his books in order for the following day. The bank inspectors were coming then, and everything had to be brought up to date. He was a very conscientious chap. And he died for the bank, even though it was to no avail."

"Do you mean he died from overwork?"

"No, no. He was murdered."

"Would you mind telling me exactly what happened?" Simon asked patiently. The manager lowered his head for a moment of silence.

"No one will ever know exactly. He was dead when I found him in the morning, with ghastly wounds on his hands and face. I shall never forget the sight. And the vault was blown open, and everything of value gone. The way the police reconstructed it, he must have been surprised by the thieves. He knew the combination to the vault, but he did not give it to them. Instead, he must have tried to grab their gun — a shotgun — and that was when his hands were blown to shreds. But even that didn't stop poor Dino. He must have gone on struggling with them, until they shot him in the face and he died."

"How much did they get?"

"New and used lira notes, to the value of about a hundred thousand pounds, as well as some negotiable bonds and other things. Some of it has turned up since then, but most of it was never traced. And the criminal have never been caught."

Simon asked a few more questions, but elicited nothing more that was important or relevant. As soon as he found that he had exhausted all the useful information that that source could give him, he thanked the manager and excused himself.

"Please give Euston my regards," the manager said. "I'm afraid he will be shocked to hear the story. He and Dino were quite good friends."

"If Dino hasn't told him already," said the Saint, "I wouldn't quite know how to get the news to him."

The manager looked painfully blank.

"Euston is dead too," Simon explained. "He got himself murdered in Naples the other night."

"Dear me!" The manager was stunned. "What a tragic coincidence – there couldn't be any connection, of course?"

"Of course," said the Saint, who saw no point in wasting time discussing his nebulous suspicions with this interlocutor.

Outside, the heat of the day was already filling the street, but Simon hardly noticed it. His brain was too busy with the new thread that had been added to the tangled web.

At least one detail had been confirmed: the large parcel of boodle about which he had theorized had now become a historical fact and could be identified as the proceeds of the bank robbery. The question remained whether it had been dispersed or whether it was still hidden somewhere. But in exchange, another part of the puzzle became more obscure: if Destamio was not Cartelli, how did he fit into the picture?

"Scusi, signore – ha lei uno fiammifero?"

A thin man stopped him at the mouth of a narrow passageway leading off the main street, holding up an unlit cigarette in one hand. The other hand was inside his jacket as he gave a small bow. The everyday bustle of the street flowed around them as Simon took out his lighter.

"Will this do?"

He flicked the lighter into flame and held it, almost unthinkingly, his mind still occupied with other things. The man bent forward with his cigarette, and at the same time brought his other hand out and plunged a knife straight into Simon's midriff.

Or rather, that was his intention, and anyone but the Saint would have been dying with six inches of steel in his stomach. But Simon had not been unthinking for quite long enough, and the significance of the thin man's concealed hand sparked his lightning reflexes in the nick of time to twist aside from the slashing blade. Even so, it was so close the the point caught in his coat and tore a long gash.

Simon Templar would not often have gone berserk over a little damage to a garment, but it must be remembered what had so recentlly happened to the rest of his wardrobe. Now he was wearing his only remaining suit, and this too had been wrecked, leaving him with literally nothing but rags to his name. Combined with a natural

resentment towards strangers who took advantage of his kindly instincts to try to stick daggers into his digestive apparatus, it was the last straw.

But instead of blinding him, anger only made his actions more precise. He grasped the wrist of the knife hand as it went by, and pivoted, locking the thin man's arm under his own. He held that position with cold calculation, just long enough to make sure that an adequate quorum of witnesses had stopped and stared and thoroughly registered the fact of which one was holding the knife; and then he made another swift sharp movement that resulted in a crack of breaking bone and a short scream from his victim. The stiletto fell to the pavement.

Without releasing his grip on the thin man's wrist, Simon freed his other hand, carefully adjusted the position of his target, and put all his weight into a piston stroke that planted his fist squarely in the center of the other's face. Under the impact, nose and face gave way with a most satisfying crunch, but the man went down without another vocal sound, and lay still. All things considered, Simon decided, as his fury subsided as quickly as it had flared, it had been only a humane anesthetic for a fractured ulna.

The whole incident had taken only a few seconds. Looking around warily for any possible second assault wave, he saw a small Fiat standing at the other end of the alley where it connected with the next parallel street. The door on the near side was open, and a blue-chinned bandit sat at the wheel, staring towards the Saint with his jaw still sagging. Then he suddenly came to life, slammed the door, and stepped frantically on the gas.

Simon picked up the fallen stiletto, ignoring the gathering crowd which gesticulated and jabbered around him but kept a safe distance. It was perfectly balanced, the blade honed to a shaving edge, a deadly tool in the hands of an expert. The Saint was not sorry to think that at least one such virtuoso would not be working for some time.

A policeman finally came pushing through the mob, one hand on his holstered pistol, and Simon coolly tendered him the hilt of the souvenir.

"This is what I was attacked with," he said, taking none of the risks of undue diffidence. "All these people saw me disarm him. I shall be happy to help yeu take him to the police station and sign the charges against him."

The policeman swivelled a coldly professional eye over the

crowd, whose members immediately began a circulatory movement as the spectators in front were stirred by a sudden desire to be in the rear. Simon saw his witnesses rapidly evaporating; but before the last shy personality could melt away the *polizie,* inured to coping with the evasiveness inspired by his vocation, had stepped forward and collared two of them — a pimply youth with an acute case of strabismus, and a portly matron bedizened with bangles like an animated junk stall.

The only things they had in common were their observation of the knifing attempt and a profound reluctance to admit this to the constabulary. Nevertheless, the policeman quarried from them a grudging admission that they had seen some of the events which had occurred; though the ocular abnormality of the younger one might have cast doubts on the value of his testimony. He then appropriated their identity cards, which they could redeem only by appearing at the police station to make depositions. Dismissed, they retired gratefully into the background; and the policeman brought his functionally jaundiced scrutiny back to the Saint.

"Why did you kill him?" he asked, looking gloomily from the knife in his hand to the recumbent figure on the sidewalk.

"I didn't kill him," Simon insisted patiently. "He tried to murder me, but I didn't feel like letting him. So I disarmed him and knocked him out. The knife you're holding is his, not mine."

The policeman examined the weapon once more, flicking open the mechanism of the blade with his thumb nail. He closed it again with one hand and pushed the safety button into place with an automatic motion which revealed long familiarity with such devices.

Behind him, two more police officers appeared, causing the crowd to lose all further interest and disperse. The one who had been first on the scene saluted the more lavishly gold-braided of the newcomers and mumbled an explanation in dialect. His superior stared at the Saint darkly, but showed no inclination to discuss the crime further in the public street. Simon accepted their glum detachment with seraphic indifference, and even allowed himself to be jammed into the rear of an undersized police car without further protest. Whatever consequences were to develop next would have to reveal themselves at the *questura.*

Once inside that ancient building, the recording and annotating of the fracas proceeded with ponderous solemnity. There

was an incredible amount of laborious writing on multiple forms, and the continual thumping of rubber stamps accompanied it like a symbolic drum-roll of bureaucracy. The only ripple in the remorseless impersonality of the routine occurred when the Saint presented his passport for examination, and raised eyebrows and knowing glances informed him that his reputation was not entirely unknown even there.

When the knife-wielding citizen was brought in, Simon saw that his injuries had been partly patched up by a police surgeon: one splinted arm hung in a sling, and a large wad of gauze was taped over his nose. From behind the edges of it, a pair of bloodshot eyes glared hatred at the Saint, who responded with a beatific smile.

With the preliminary recordings completed, another door opened and the *maresciallo dei carabinieri* made his impressive entrance.

His elaborately decorated and braided jacket and cap, worn even in the heat of the office, left no doubt of the eminence of his rank. His head was nobly Roman and graying at the temples, not unlike the average man's mental picture of a Caesar; though the softness of the lower lip suggested Nero rather than Julius.

He stared coldly down the straight length of his nose at Simon; then swivelled his eyes, like the black orifices of cannons coming to bear, towards the bandaged knife-wielder.

"Well, Tonio," he said stolidly, "you were not out of trouble very long this time."

"I did nothing, *maresciallo*, nothing! I swear it on my mother's tomb. It was this *fannullone*" — the man called Tonio jerked the thumb of his good hand towards Simon — "who caused the trouble. He is a madman, perhaps. He comes up to me on the street, insults me, pulls out a knife. I had done nothing!"

The *maresciallo* glanced through the papers which had been written up, and turned his imperial gaze on Simon.

"What have you to say about this?"

"Nothing — except that Tonio must have very little respect for his mother," said the Saint calmly. "There were a dozen people around when he attacked me with the knife. They all saw me disarm him. Some of them may also have noticed his accomplice waiting near by in a car, who left rather hurriedly when Tonio was detained. If that is not enough, ask him how my coat was cut if I was trying to stab him, or why I did not use the knife on him instead of my

hands. After that, you might ask him who hired him to kill me."

The *maresciallo* heard the words with pursed lips and mask-like impassibility. He poked at Simon's passport on the desk before him.

"We do not like international criminals who pose as simple tourists," he said. "Who come here and attack people."

Simon Templar's eyes widened for an instant as he took the shock. Then they narrowed into ships of blue ice as cold as the edge that crept into his voice.

"Are you suggesting that there is one grain of truth in that creature's story, or that there is one shred of evidence to support it?"

Under the pressure of the challenge the *maresciallo's* imperial manner slipped a bit. He squirmed inside his gorgeous jacket, and seemed to find it a relief to switch his gaze to Tonio at frequent intervals.

"That is not the point. I mean to say, this is an investigation, and we must consider all possibilities. There is some doubt among the witnesses as to exactly what happened. And you must admit, Signor Templar, that your reputation is not spotless."

Simon glanced around at the *carabinieri*, who stared stolidly back, registering neither approval nor disapproval of their officer's attitude. The Saint had never cherished any childlike faith in the impartiality of the police, but he did not have to be excessively cynical to realize that there was something more here than a normal suspiciousness of his honesty and respectable intentions. And an insubstantial but chilling draught seemed to touch his spine as it dawned on him that something more dangerous to him than any knifeman's blade might lie beneath the surface of that impersonal hostility.

Then yet another man came in, in ordinary clothes but with a subtle air of authority that invisibly outranked the *maresciallo's* gold encrusted magnificence, and the tension that had begun to build up dissolved as if it had all been an illusion.

He was a man of medium build, flat-bellied, with gray eyes and curly blond hair that are native only to northern Italy. His browned features seemed almost boyish at first, until one discovered the intermingled lines etched among them by twenty years more than was suggested by their youthful contours. But he walked with an athletic spring in his step which again belied those skin-deep foreshadowing of middle age.

He stopped in front of Tonio, studying him carefully, and said: "I am glad to see someone has worked on your ugly face,

piece of filth."

He added some more vivid epithets which would have invited a duel to the death in any tavern in Sicily, but the wounded Tonio only glowered and kept his lips buttoned.

No one else spoke either as the newcomer turned to the *maresciallo's* desk and flicked through the papers on it.

"Simon Templar!" he said, looking up and laughing. "We seem to have landed a big one this time."

He came towards Simon and offered his hand.

"Let me introduce myself, Signor Saint: my name is Marco Ponti. I am the *agente investigativo* here, what you would call a police detective. Now you know all about me, because I am sure you know all about detectives. But I also know something about you. And since you are here, it is my business to ask what brings you to Sicily?"

"Only the same attractions that bring thousands of other tourists here," answered the Saint, relaxing guardedly. "Which of course did not include having one of your problem *paisani* try to knife me."

"Ah, poor Italy—and poorer Sicily! Many are in want here and turn to crime to fill their stomachs. Though of course that is no excuse. Be assured that justice will be done. We ask you only to be available to support your charges."

"With pleasure. But there seems to be some difficulty."

"Difficulty?" Ponti's eyebrows lifted elaborately. He turned back to the desk and riffled through the papers again. "Everything looks in order to me—is that not right, *maresciallo?*"

The officer shrugged.

"No difficulties. I was only asking a few questions."

"*Ebbene!* Then I suggest that you, Signor Templar, give us the name of your hotel—but you have already done that, I see in your statement. That is all we need for now. We will notify you when the case appears before the *giudice instruttore,* the magistrate. Unless the *maresciallo* has anything more to ask?"

The *maresciallo* could not have lost interest more completely. A gesture that combined a shrug, a small throwing-away motion of the hands, and a regal tilt of the head, conveyed that he was finished, bored, and only wished to be spared further tedium.

"And you, Signor Templar, have nothing more to say here?"

Ponti's eyes looked directly into the Saint's, and for an instant the engaging boyishness no longer seemed to be the dominant characteristic of his face. Instead, there was only an intense and urgent seriousness. As clearly as

if the lines in his forehead had spelled it out in capital letters, it changed his words, for Simon's reception only, from a question to a command.

"Nothing more," said the Saint steadily.

His acceptance of the silent order was instinctive. Whatever had been going wrong before, Ponti's arrival had temporarily diverted it, and Simon Templar was not one to scorn a lifeboat until unfathomed waters closed over his head. Besides which, he sensed an essential difference between Ponti's implied warning and the kind that had menaced him a little earlier. But the questions which it raised would have to wait. For the present, the opportunity to leave the police station was satisfaction enough. He was already suffering some of the feeling of claustrophobia which was inclined to afflict him in places that had a direct connection with prisons.

"I'm sorry we have kept you so long," he said. "It must be already past your accustomed lunch hour. I hope it will only improve your appetite for our Sicilian cooking.

"Where would you recommend me to try it?" Simon asked.

"The Caprice is near by, and they have the first eggplant of the season. You should not leave Palermo without trying their *caponata di melanzane.* And a bottle of Ciclope dell'Etna."

"I can taste it already," Simon said.

They shook hands again, and one of the stoical *carabinieri* opened the door for him.

After the suffocating atmosphere of the police station the fresh air was revivifying, even as redolent as it was of the rich effluvia of Palermo. The Caprice, which Simon found without much difficulty, was a cool cavern of refuge from the cascade of glare and heat outside, and he entered its depths gratefully, selecting a strategically located table with a wall behind and an unobstructed vista in front.

"The *signore* would like an *aperitivo?*" queried the nonagenarian waiter.

"Campari-soda. With plenty of ice and a twist of lemon."

"And afterwards?"

"I will order presently. I am waiting for a friend."

The Saint was as sure of this as he could be of anything. He could not imagine for a moment that Investigator Marco Ponti had taken the trouble to recommend this restaurant for no reason but pure gastronomic enthusiasm. And as he sipped the astringent coolness of his drink, he hoped that this private meeting would throw some light on the knife attack and the peculiar antipathy of the *maresciallo.*

Very shortly the street door

opened again; but it was not the expected form of the detective that stepped in. This, however, proved to be no disappointment to the Saint at all.

It was a girl . . . if the writer may perpetrate one of the most *inadequate statements in contemporary literature.*

There seems to be a balance of nature operating in Italy which compensates in advance with extraordinary youthful beauty for the excessive deterioration which awaits most of her women in later years. Long before middle age, most of them have succumbed to superabundant flesh expanded in the dropsical mould that follows uncontrolled motherhood, and for which their tent-like black dresses are perhaps the only decent covering; and their faces tend to develop hirsute adornments which would be envied by many a junior Guards officer. But the perfection of face and form which a compassionate fate may grant them before that has been observed by most modern moviegoers. And this specimen was astounding proof that the nets of pandering producers had by no means scooped all the cream of the crop.

Her hair was Stygian midnight, a shining metallic black that wreathed a delicate oval face with the texture of magnolias, full-lipped and kohl-eyed. The simple silk confection that she wore offered more emphasis than concealment to the form it covered but could scarcely contain. It was obvious that no trickery of supporting garments was needed or was used to exploit the burgeoning figure, rounded almost to excess in the breasts above and the flanks below, yet bisected by a waist of wasp-like delicacy. To complete the entrancing inventory, Simon allowed his gaze to slide down the sweet length of leg to the small sandalled feet and drift appreciatively back up again.

Whereupon he received a glance of withering disdain of the kind that had obviously had much practice in shrivelling the presumptuous and freezing the extremities of the lecherous, and which made it depressingly apparent that like many other beautiful Italian girls she was also impregnably respectable. Only the Saint's unjustified faith in the purity of his admiration enabled him to meet the snub with a smile of seraphic impenitence until it was she who looked away.

The cashier nodded to her in beaming recognition, and after a brief exchange of words picked up the telephone. Simon realized with regret that the girl had not come into eat, but to ask for a taxi to be called—a common enough method in those parts

where the quest for a public phone can be a major project.

After another word of thanks she started out again, and an entering customer stood aside and held the door for her. She swept past him, accepting the service as if it were hers by divine right, and he had to content himself for reward with the pleasure of watching her all the way into the cab, which providentially was an old-fashioned one with a high step. It was only after Simon had shared this treat with him, and the man finally let the door close and come towards him, that the Saint noticed who it was.

"Marco Ponti — what a surprise," he murmured, with no visible sign of that reaction. "Will you join me in a mess of eggplant? Although I can't compete as an attraction with what you were just leering at."

Ponti made the classic gesture, hands spread at shoulder level, palms up, with which an Italian can say practically anything—in this case, combined with a slight upward roll of the eyes, it signified. "Who wouldn't leer at something like that? But what a waste of time!"—and sat down.

"I fear the Swiss convent where she has been receiving her final polish has chilled her southern blood for a while," he said. "But one day it will be warmed again. I have been hoping to make her acquaintance since she returned, but Gina Destamio and I do not rotate in the same social circles."

"*What* did you call her? Simon asked with unconcealed astonishment.

"The name means something to you?"

"Only if she is related to a certain Al Destamio, whose dubious hospitality I enjoyed on Capri yesterday."

The detective's smile was mask-like again, but behind it Simon could sense a stony grimness.

"She is his niece," Ponti said.

The Saint had received so many shocks lately that he was becoming habituated to absorbing them without expression.

"After all, it's a small country," he remarked. He looked down into the rhodamine effervescence of his aperitif, and beckoned the waiter. "Would you like one of these before we eat?"

"With your permission, I will have a brandy. Buton Vecchio, since that is their most expensive —as an underpaid public servant I have few opportunities to enjoy such extravagance." Ponti waited until the waiter had shuffled off before he said: "What was your business with Destamio?"

The question was asked in the same casual tone, but his eyes

bored into the Saint unblinkingly.

"I've been wondering about that myself," Simon replied coolly. "We met completely by chance the other day, and we seem to have rather quickly developed some differences of opinion. So radical, in fact, that I wouldn't be surprised if he was responsible for Tonio's attack on me this morning."

The other considered this carefully, before his smile flashed on again.

"I have heard many stories about you, Saint, some undoubtedly false and perhaps some of them true. But in all of them I have heard nothing to suggest that your relations with these people would be likely to be cordial. But it would have been interesting to hear precisely what the differences were that you refer to."

At this moment the waiter tottered back with the brandy. Before he could escape again, Simon seized the opportunity to order their lunch, or rather to let Ponti order it, for he was quite content to follow the lead of the counsellor who had directed him here.

By the time the waiter had retired again out of earshot, the Saint was conveniently able to forget the last implied question and resume the conversation with one of his own.

"Would you mind telling me just what you meant by *'these people'*? he asked.

"The Mafia," Ponti said calmly.

This time, Simon allowed himself to blink.

"You mean Tonio was hired from them?"

"That *cretino* is one of them, of course. A small one. But I am sure that Al Destamio is a big one, though I cannot prove it."

"That," said the Saint, "makes it really interesting."

Ponti sipped his brandy.

"Do you know anything about the Mafia?"

"Only what I've read in the papers, like everyone else. And some more fanciful enlargements in paperback novels. But on the factual side, I don't even know what *mafia* means."

"It is a very old word, and no one can be quite sure where it came from. One legend says that it originated here in Palermo in the thirteenth century, when the French ruled the Two Siciles. The story is that a young man was leaving the church after his wedding and was separated from his bride for a few minutes while he talked to the priest. In that time she was seized by a drunken French sergeant, who dragged her away and assaulted her — and when she tried to escape, killed her. The bridegroom arrived too late to save her, but

he attacked and killed the sergeant, shouting *'Morte alla Francia!* – Death to France!' Palermo had suffered cruelly during the occupation, and this was all that the people needed to hear. A revolt started, and in a few days all the French in the city had been hunted down and slain. *'Morte alla Francia, Italia anela!'* was the battle-cry: Italy wishes death to France! Of course, soon after, the French came back and killed most of the rebels, and the survivors fled into the mountains. But they kept the initials of their battle-cry, M-A-F-I-A, as their name . . . At last, that is one explanation."

"It's hard to think of the Mafia as a sort of thirteenth-century Resistance movement."

"It is, now; but that is truly what they were like in the beginning. Right up to the unification of Italy, the Mafia was usually on the side of the oppressed. Only after that it turned to extortion and murder."

"I seem to have heard that something like that happened to the original Knights Templar," said the Saint reflectively. "But aside from that, I don't see why you should connect them with me."

Ponti waited while the *caponata di melanzane* was served and the wine poured. Then he answered as if there had been no interruption.

"It is very simple. Whether you knew what you were doing or not, you have become involved with the Mafia. A little while ago I told you that justice would be done to Tonio. But if he was under the orders of Destamio, and not merely defending himself because you caught him picking your pocket, I should not be so optimistic. Witnesses will be found to swear that it was you who attacked him. And nothing will make him confess that he even knows Destamio. That is the *omerta,* the noble silence. He will die before he speaks. Not for a noble reason, perhaps, but because if he talked there would be no place for him to hide, no place in the world. There are no traitors to the Mafia –live traitors, that is–and the death that comes to them is not an easy one."

Simon tasted the Ciclope dell' Etna. It was light and faintly acid, but a cool and refreshing accompaniment to the highly seasoned eggplant.

"At the *questura,*" he said, "Tonio already seemed to be in better standing than I was. Does the Mafia's long arm reach even into the ranks of the incorruptible police on this island?"

"Such things are possible," Ponti said with great equanimity. "The Mafia is very strong on this impoverished island. That is why I gave you the hint in the *ques-*

tura that if you had any more to say to me we should talk elsewhere."

"And I am supposed to know that you are the one member of the police who is above suspicion."

The detective took no umbrage, but only dispensed with his smile, so that Simon was aware again of what an effective mask it was, behind which anything could be hidden.

"Let me tell you another story, Signor Templar, which is not a legend. It is about a man who came from Bergamo, in the north, to open a shop on this sunny island. It was difficult at first, but after a time he had a business that kept his family in modest comfort. Then the Mafia came to demand tribute, and through ignorance or pride he refused to pay. When they sent an enforcer to beat him with a club in his own shop, he took away the club and beat the enforcer. But he was a little too strong and angry, and the enforcer died. There is only one thing that happens then: the *vendetta* and murder. The man and his wife and daughter were killed, and only the little son escaped because he had been sent to visit his grandparents in Bergamo, and when they heard what had happened they gave him to friends who took him to another town and pretended he was their own. But the boy knew all the story, and he grew up with a hatred strong enough to start a *vendetta* against all the Mafia. But when he was old enough to do anything he knew that that was not the way."

"And so he joined the police to try to do something legally?"

"A poorly paid job, as I said before, and a dangerous one if it is done honestly. But do you think a man with such memories could be on the side of those murderers?"

"But if your police station is a nest of *mafiosi*, how can you get anything done? That two-faced *maresciallo* almost had me convicted of attempting to murder myself, before you came in. Then everything changed. Do they suspect that you may be investigating them too?"

"Not yet. They think I am a happy fool who bumbles into the wrong places—an honest fool who refuses bribes and reports any offer of one. Men in my job are always being transferred, and so they hide what they can from me and wait patiently for me to be transferred again. But being from the north, it has taken me many years and much pulling of strings to get here, and I have no intention of being moved again before I have achieved some of my purpose."

If ever the Saint had heard and seen sincerity, he had to feel

that he was in the presence of it now.

"So you want to hear what I can tell you," he said slowly. "But knowing my reputation, would you believe me? And aren't you a bit interested in the chance that I might incriminate myself?"

"I am not playing a game, *signore,*" the detective said harshly. "I do not ask for any of your other secrets. You can tell me you have murdered thirteen wives, if you like, and it would mean nothing to me if you helped in the one thing that matters more to me than life"

Perhaps the first commandment of any outlaw should be, *Thou shalt keep thy trap shut at all times;* but on the other hand he would not be plying his lonely trade if he were not a breaker of rules, and this sometimes means his own rules as well. Simon knew that this was one time when he had to gamble.

"All right," he said. "Let's see what you make of this . . ."

He related the events of the past few days with eidetic objectiveness. He left nothing out and drew no conclusions, waiting to see what Ponti would make of it.

"It is as clear as *minestrone,*" said the detective, at the end of the recital. "You thought the Englishman Euston was killed in Naples because he recognized Destamio as being someone named Dino Cartelli. Yet Destamio showed you proof of his identity, and you learned here in Palermo that Cartelli has been dead for many years. That seems to show that you are—as the Americans say—woofing up the wrong tree."

"Perhaps." Simon finished his meal and his wine. "But in that case how do you explain the coincidence of Euston's murder, Destamio's sudden interest in me, the money he gave me, and the attempt to kill me?"

"If you assume there is a connection, only two explanations are possible. Either Destamio was Cartelli, or Cartelli was Destamio."

"Exactly."

"But an imposter could not take the place of Destamio, one of the chieftains of the Mafia. And if the man who died in the bank was not Cartelli, who was he?"

"Those are the puzzles I have to solve, and I intend to keep digging until I do."

"Or until someone else digs for you—a grave," Ponti snorted, then puffed explosively on a cigarette.

Simon smiled, and ordered coffee.

"For me it is very good that you get involved," Ponti said after a pause. "You stir things up, and in the stirring things may come to the surface which

may be valuable to me. In my position, I am forced to be too careful. You are not careful enough. Perhaps you do not believe how powerful and vicious these people are, though I do not think that would make any difference to you. But I will help you as much as I can. In return, I ask you to tell me everything you learn that concerns the Mafia."

"With pleasure," Simon said.

He did not think it worth while to mention a small mental reservation, that while he would be glad to share any facts he gleaned, he would consider any substantial booty he stumbled upon to be a privateer's legitimate perquisite.

"You could start by telling me how much you know about Destamio," he said.

"Not much that is any use. It is all guessing and association. Everyone here is either a member of the Mafia or too frightened of them to talk. But I am forced to deduce, from the people he meets, and where he goes, and the money he can spend, and the awe that he inspires, that he must be in the upper councils of the organization. The rest of his family does not seem to be involved, which is unusual; but I keep an eye on them."

"After seeing the niece, Gina, I can understand about that eye of yours. What others are there?"

"His sister, Donna Maria, a real *faccia tosta.* And an ancient uncle well gone into senility. They have a country house outside the town, an old baronial mansion, very grim and rundown."

"You must tell me how to get there."

"You would like to see Gina again?" Ponti asked, with a knowing Latin grin.

"I might have better luck than you," said the Saint brazenly. "And that seems the most logical place to start probing into Al's family background and past life. Besides which, think how excited he'll be when he hears I have been calling at his ancestral home and getting to know his folks."

Ponti looked at him long and soberly.

"One of us is mad, or perhaps both," he said. "But I will draw you a map to show you how to get there."

NEXT MONTH —

The Saint continues his probing into Alessandro Destamio's background in the second exciting installment of **VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT**

the brazen serpent

by R. Austin Freeman

I WONDER how long it took the hermit-crab to learn to stick his soft tail into a protecting whelk shell? Generations, no doubt; and many a painful nip he must have got in the interval. How much more ready is the response of man to external changes! Clothe a rowdy under-graduate in the clerical garb, and forthwith his mien is sober, even unto smugness. Trick him out in the motley of the army, and he will bounce and swagger like a very Bobadil. Clap a tall hat on him, and dub him "Doctor," and behold, respectability envelops him as a garment! Dress him in the horrible livery of the gaol, and he shall walk the crooked way henceforth and for ever. Man is a very adaptable animal.

On the morning after my escape from prison I awoke in my own familiar bedroom, but with the sense of a new personality. I was an escaped convict. It is true that I was an innocent man, that my whole prison life was less

Dr. Richard Austin Freeman gave us what many have called "the greatest scientific detective of fiction—the incomparable Dr. Thorndyke." Also author of a number of stories about pure crime, Dr. Freeman wrote about the contribution of several personalities to this field including, here, the true story of the debut in his profession of a young man with decidedly unique talents.

From: R. Austin Freeman's THE EXPLOITS OF DANBY CROKER
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than forty-eight hours, and that my description in the register was so inaccurate that I was fairly safe from identification. The fact remained that I was an escaped convict, "wanted" by the police. Hereafter must I walk abroad warily, must slip past "the man in blue" with averted face, and scan the feet of every tall civilian for the tell-tale constabulary boot.

The subtle change appeared in my very first action. I had received a letter from old Mr. Parmenter, the famous collector, asking me to call on him. Now, I had often called on old Parmenter, for we had a strong bond of sympathy: we both loved the beautiful productions of the goldsmith. With this difference, however—that he delighted in possession; I in production. Artistic metalwork was the passion of my life, and the irony of Fate had led me to the machine-shop and the drawing-office. A Cellini by instinct, I was, in actual fact, an engineer.

I have hinted at a departure from my customary conduct. It was a small matter, but significant of the change. When I set forth for Parmenter's house my pocket contained a fat cigar case, and the cigar case contained two metal plates, each coated with a thick slab of moulding-wax. I had nothing definite in my mind, only I might get a chance of taking a "squeeze" of something, and that squeeze might be useful hereafter.

I found old Parmenter seated on the floor, or rather on a cushion—he was too stout to kneel with comfort—arranging a new haul in the bottom drawer of his coin-cabinet.

"Morning, Danby," he chirped, holding out his hand. "I can't get up to shake hands. Too fat, to tell the brutal truth, so you must excuse me. Obesity knows no law!"

He was a genial old fellow, was Parmenter.

"You are wondering what I want you for, I expect," he continued.

"I supposed you had got something new that you wanted me to look at," I replied.

"No, it's not that this time, though I am always glad to have your opinion of a new find, for there's no judge like the actual craftsman. No; I've got a little project, Danby. You're out of a job just now, aren't you?"

"Well, just at the moment."

"Well, now, do you remember old Jacob Lyon, the curio-dealer? But of course you do. Well, old Lyon is dead. Died quite suddenly. And I have bought the stock and good-will from his daughter, Judith, and taken over the lease."

"What on earth did you do that for?" I exclaimed.

"I had an idea that I might put some responsible person in to carry it on—There, it's no use beating about the bush. I thought I'd put you in if you cared to take it on."

I was thunderstruck. In fact, I thought old Parmenter was going 'balmy."

"Don't refuse it hastily, old fellow," he went on persuasively; "it's a really good thing."

"Why don't you run the show yourself?" I asked.

"No time. Besides, my dear Danby, I am an incurable collector. I shouldn't buy anything that I didn't like, and, if I liked the things, I'd see everybody hanged before I'd part with them. I should never sell anything. It wouldn't suit me at all, whereas it would suit you down to the ground. You are fond of works of art, but you don't want to possess them. You could have the handling of things of beauty, and then make a profit on them."

I wandered round the cabinet which stood in the middle of the room, reflecting on the proposition. It undoubtedly had its attractions. To live amidst the things that I loved would be a pleasant life, and possibly profitable, too. I looked down absently at the medals exhibited in the cabinet. The glazed top had been removed, and I could get a better view than usual. Suddenly my attention was arrested by a splendid bronze medallion, and I stooped to examine it.

"What a lovely thing this is!" I exclaimed. "This oval medallion, I mean. It looks like a genuine Cellini, too!"

"Genuine!" exclaimed Parmenter, craning up so that I could just see the top of his head over the cabinet. "It's more than genuine—it's nearly unique. That is the famous 'Brazen Serpent' medallion. It was made by Cellini for Pope Clement VII, but His Holiness did not like the reverse, and ordered Cellini to design a fresh one, which he did, and struck three impressions, one in gold, one in silver, and one in bronze. But just then the Pope died, and Cellini had the three medallions left on his hands, and, as he did not care for the new reverse, he destroyed the die. So only three impressions with the new reverse were ever struck. This is the bronze one, and it is worth about five thousand pounds."

"And where are the other two?"

"The gold copy is at the Uffizzi. As to the silver one, some fool has probably melted it down. At any rate, no one has ever seen it. It would be worth a fortune if it ever turned up. But to come back to my little plan, Danby; don't you think it might suit you? And doesn't it occur to you that your skill as a metal-

worker might come in uncommonly useful?"

As a matter of fact, it had, but I dissembled. And, meanwhile, I drew out the cigar case, and opened it silently.

"How do you mean?" I asked. "I am only an amateur as far as goldsmith's work is concerned; and besides, you blooming collectors won't look at anything new."

"Not if we know that it's new," chuckled old Parmenter; "but sometimes we don't."

I was really shocked at the old reprobate.

"You mean to say," said I, delicately lifting the medallion out of its recess, and laying it noiselessly on the smooth mahogany, "that I might do a little in the forgery line."

"Forgery is an unnecessarily strong expression," said Parmenter. "Let us say you make a faithful copy of one of the delightful productions of an old master, and offer it for sale without comment. You don't compel any one to buy; you merely offer it. It's just a case of *caveat emptor*. It's the connoisseur's business to know. I don't complain if some one sells me a copy. Only he doesn't. I don't let him."

I took out one of my plates of moulding-wax, and laid it softly on the medallion, standing on tiptoe to look over at Parmenter. "That's mere sophistry," said I, making firm pressure on the wax, and feeling the medallion sink into it. "But you know perfectly well that if I sell you a copy, and allow you to believe you are buying an original, I am practising a fraud on you." I lifted the wax, and, carefully picking off the adherent medallion, laid the latter down, reverse side up.

"There is no fraud if there is no misrepresentation," said Parmenter.

I replaced the wax, which, as I could see, bore a perfect impression of the medallion, in the cigar case.

"I am afraid you are a very wicked old gentleman," said I, taking out the second plate, and laying the wax carefully on the reverse of the medallion.

Parmenter chuckled gleefully, but made no reply.

"You see," I continued, keeping a steady pressure on the wax, "it is not merely a question of morality. It is a matter of policy. Big profits are made, no doubt, on forgeries, but who gets those profits? Not the forger. It is the dealer who rakes in the shekels."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Parmenter, as I once more picked the medallion out of the wax in which it was embedded. "That is just the point. I am proposing that you shall become a dealer."

I silently replaced the bronze oval, obverse upwards, in its recess, and slipped the wax mould

into the cigar case. And, as I pocketed the case, I said reproachfully:

"You are holding out a great temptation to me, Mr. Parmenter." And I spoke the truth. He was. But he little suspected the nature of the temptation.

"Nonsense!" said the old gentleman. "Here, come and help me up, and we'll go and have a look at the place. I think you'll see an opening in it." I went round and hoisted him to his feet—no small matter, for he weighed fully eighteen stone—and when we had replaced the glazed top of the cabinet, and made all secure, he toddled off to get ready.

"I should like to hear your scheme in a little more detail," I said, as we trudged along side by side. "You know that I've got no capital, of course?"

"I guessed it," said Parmenter. "But you won't want any. I've bought the stock and good-will, and taken over the lease, and I propose to transfer them to you by a deed. The goods will be absolutely yours, and you will repay me ten per cent of the profits until the purchase money is repaid. Then you will be free; and, meanwhile, I take the entire risk if the concern turns out a failure."

It was a very generous proposal — absurdly generous. So generous, in fact, that it made me a little suspicious. Absolute altruism is a somewhat rare product.

"But look here, Mr. Parmenter," said I: "where do you come in? What are you going to get out of this?"

Old Parmenter chuckled.

"So young and so suspicious!" said he. "But I should have thought it would be obvious; however, if it isn't, I will explain. You know that the lamented Jacob had an excellent connection—as a buyer, I mean. I have had some very good things from him from time to time, and more will come to you, no doubt. Now, all I want is the first refusal of anything that is likely to suit me. That is all. I will pay the full market price—I am a rich man, and not niggardly—but I want the first chance. I want to get to windward of Jacobi; he's my chief rival, and Lyon used to favour him. I lost that Brandenburg snuff-box through Jacobi getting in first. Now I shall want you to promise me the first pick of all new stock that comes in, and if you do that I shall have made an excellent investment."

This was intelligible enough, I knew Jacobi as a rich and eager collector, who, however, unlike Parmenter, combined profit with pleasure by doing an occasional deal. And I knew that the two men were deadly rivals, perpetually tripping one another up in the auction-rooms, and

generally adding to the gaiety of nations and the auctioneer's commissions.

The premises of the late Mr. Lyon engendered certain suspicions in my mind, they were so uncommonly convenient. They formed the ground floor of a small, old-fashioned private house in a by-street off High Street, Camden Town, the door of which bore a brass plate inscribed J. LYON, DEALER IN WORKS OF ART. The house stood at the corner of a paved court, and had a deeply recessed side-door opening on the court; an ideal arrangement for visitors of a diffident and retiring habit of mind.

"The business premises," said Parmenter, ringing the bell, "are bigger than they look. The shop, if we may call it by that name, consists of the ground-floor rooms, but all the rest of the house is used for storage excepting the second floor, which is occupied by Judith Lyon, and she wants to keep it. I suppose you don't mind".

He cocked a roguish eye on me, and I looked down my nose. Women are all very well, but I would have preferred the fair Judith a little farther away. Women are kittle cattle.

"It depends on what she is like," I said airily. And at this moment the question was solved by the opening of the door.

Judith Lyon was what Mr. Peter would have called "opulent"; tall, shapely, gorgeous, red-haired, with a face and figure that would have sent Solomon flying to the nearest registry-office.

I walked into the hall with a graceful bow and an unctuous smirk; and I regret to say that, as old Parmenter passed me, he positively winked.

On the collection of lumber that filled the house, I could form no sane judgment. When Judith Lyon sat down on a worm-eaten chair, that chair creaked with ecstasy, and its whispers of Wardour Street were hushed. When she looked in a Venetian mirror, its bumpy surface showed me the face of an angel—with a toothache. When she tinkled a rickety harpsichord, I heard the sound of the timbrel mingling with the clamour of the "jumping chariots." It was of no use. Of course, I signed the deed; Judith witnessed it, and we sealed it with a Tassi gem out of the stock. When I shook hands with old Parmenter opposite the Cobden Statue, and turned homewards, I carried the duplicate deed and inventory in my pocket, and the image of Judith Lyon in my heart.

But business is business, and the day was still young. Parmenter's subtle hints, reacting

on my natural ingenuity, had suggested quite a pretty little scheme, and that scheme must be pushed forward, for on the next day but one I entered into occupation of my business premises. Meanwhile, Judith was acting as caretaker, and the Lord only knew what bedevilments she was up to.

The wax moulds were perfect. I viewed them through a lens, and marvelled at my own dexterity. The next thing was to blacklead them, which I did with the utmost care, using the graphite from a 6 B Kohinoor pencil, and the softest of camel-hair brushes. Then I fitted up a little tank and a Daniell battery, for I proposed to make electrotypes in silver from the moulds; and the silver was the difficulty. The process that I had in mind would use up more than ten shillings' worth, and I had to go out and change my last sovereign but one to obtain the material. For I had dropped three pounds odd in the escapade at Huntgate.

The whole of that day I tended the battery, keeping up a gentle current and a regular deposit, and it was late at night before a sufficient thickness of metal had grown onto the moulds; by which time I had fed no less than eighteen shillings into the tank. At last I ventured to take the moulds out of the tank. It was an anxious time, for I could not hope to pick off the electros without damaging the moulds, and if I had failed I had failed finally.

But I had not failed. The thick shells of metal separated cleanly from the moulds, and as I looked at them through a watchmaker's lens I could have shouted with triumph. Each was a replica, absolutely sharp and perfect, of one side of the medallion, but in bright silver instead of bronze. It only remained to join them together, and a perfect medallion would be the result.

So great was my delight and enthusiasm that I set to work without delay. The backs of the electros had to be filed flat and true, and each one brought to exactly half the thickness of the medallion. I had not been able to measure the original, of course, but I had looked at it, and an engineer's eye can be trusted to the hundreth of an inch.

I worked until past one in the morning, and then turned in, but I was up again at seven, as keen on my copy as the divine Benvenuto had been on the original. It was a delicate and difficut task, since the faces and edges must not be rubbed, and it was past noon before I had filed the two halves to the exact thickness, and finished them up dead true with scraper and

surface-plate.

The actual joining of the two halves I had to effect with soft solder, since I dared not use much heat; and then I had to deposit some fresh silver on the edge to cover the join, and burnish this new deposit. But, when I had done this, and cleaned off the stopping varnish, there lay before me a perfect medallion of silver. Of course, it was bright and new, an obvious electro that could not deceive a baby—if the baby was on his guard. But would he be? That remained to be seen.

A little cautious treatment with hydrogen peroxide took off the blatant newness and clothed it with a bluish film of oxide that made it look quite venerable; in which state I wrapped it carefully in tissue-paper, and putting it in my pocket, set forth gleefully for my place of business. I was not expected, but that was all the better.

On arriving at 8, Poplar Grove —that was my business address —I let myself in at the side-door with my latchkey, and passing through a little lobby, entered the back room, where I sat down on a worm-eaten monks' seat and took the inventory from my pocket.

There were several medallions in cases of various periods, but none of these was likely to agree in shape with my oval masterpiece. Presently, my eye caught an item that seemed more likely: "Cinquecento trinket-box of carved pearwood with relief—'Jacob personating Esau.'"

A certain appropriateness in the subject attracted me. I smiled grimly, and, noting the number, went in search of the box, which I presently found in the drawer of a Japanese cabinet. It was a small, flat casket, like a slab of inferior soap, and bore a crudely carved relief on the lid, from which I gathered that, if the personation was successful, Esau must have been uncommonly like a monkey. However, the box seemed to answer the purpose perfectly; it was lined with faded crimson velvet, which imparted to the medallion that I laid in it an air of quite respectable antiquity.

I placed the box—open—in a glazed cabinet opposite the window. No one could fail to see it there. Then, having locked the glass door and put the key on my bunch, I opened old Lyon's desk and took out the ledger. A curious and cryptic volume it was, but I was not, just now, concerned with its subtleties. I wanted the address of Mr. Jacobi, and, when I had found it, I put away the book, and, taking a sheet of headed letter-paper, proceeded to indite a little note to my prospective customer. I informed him that I had

taken over the business of the late Mr. Lyon, and that I had found among the stock certain trifles of antique art which I thought would be of interest to him, and which I should like to show him before they were inspected by another client whom I expected to-morrow evening. That ought to fetch him, I reflected, as I sealed up my letter. The chance of being beforehand with some other collector was one that Jacobi was not likely to miss.

I was about to leave, when I was assailed by a pang of sudden uneasiness. Suppose the house should be broken into in the night, and the precious medallion stolen? Or suppose the fair Judith should play me false? No; I would not risk it. Unlocking the cabinet, I returned the medallion to its tissue-paper and pocketed it. Then, with my mind at ease, I sneaked out silently and dropped my letter into the pillar-box.

The train was laid. The trap was baited. With the promise of a golden haul before my mental optics, I strolled off to Soho, dined handsomely, and spent a jovial evening in Joe Dalby's studio.

About four o'clock on the following day I sat down in an oaken Elizabethan chair—a palpable "fake"—for a few minutes' rest. I had arrived betimes at Poplar Grove, and, after replacing the medallion in the cabinet, had spent a busy morning raking together a collection of ivories, netsuke, medals, caskets, stibium cases, and other portable trash for the entertainment of Jacobi. Judith Lyon had looked in for a few minutes, gorgeous, debonair, and friendly in a business-like, matter-of-fact way, and had then taken herself off. The way in which the house was left to take care of itself was really alarming. I must have a word with Judith on the subject. She knew the ropes.

Suddenly a bell jangled. I went out and opened the front door. It was Jacobi.

"So you've taken over this show, have you?" said he, looking at me disparagingly. "Know anything about the business?"

"Very little," I replied. "But I shall pick it up."

"I expect you will," said Jacobi, with a grin. "And you'll drop a little capital in the process. What stuff is this that you wrote to me about?"

I led him into the room where, on a small table in front of the cabinet, I had set out part of the collection of trash.

"These are some of the things," I said.

He glanced at the collection superciliously, looked curiously round the room, and then his eye lighted on the medallion,

which displayed the reverse. He looked at it fixedly for a moment, and then, picking up a Roman stibium case, pretended to examine it minutely. But his glance continually wandered to the medallion, and his face wore a distinctly startled expression.

"These things are no use to me," he said laying down the stibium case. "Besides, I've seen 'em all before. Didn't you say you had some other things?"

"Yes, there are a few more upstairs."

"Run up and fetch them down, will you?" said Jacobi. And the note of eagerness in his voice made my heart leap.

I went out, shutting the door after me, and stamped noisily upstairs. Then, hastily grabbing up a handful of small "antiques," I stole down on tiptoe. Now my astute predecessor had bored one or two holes in the door, ostensibly for ventilation, but, from their position at the eye-level, obviously for the inspection of doubtful clients. To one of these holes I applied my eye, and the spectacle that I beheld filled me with rapture.

Jacobi was staring into the cabinet like a hungry cat before a meat-safe, and frantically trying the various keys from his bunch on the keyhole. After watching him for a few moments I tiptoed quickly up a few stairs, and then, descending noisily, entered the room, to find my client with his back to the cabinet, gazing dreamily out of the window.

Jacobi examined the trash that I had brought down, and, as he lifted the pieces, I noticed that his hands were shaking with a fine tremor. Of course, the things were of no use to him. I knew that. But I waited anxiously for his next move.

"What's that medallion in the cabinet there?" he asked carelessly.

"I don't know," I answered vacantly. "I found it locked up in the safe, though why old Lyon should have been so careful of it I can't imagine. It's only a copy—at least, so I understand."

"Who says so?" demanded Jacobi.

"A client of mine who knows a lot about medals had a look at it. He thought it was a good copy, but he wanted to refer to the original, which he says he has access to. If it's a correct copy, he's going to take it, and he has paid a deposit of ten pounds."

"Who's your client?"

"He didn't want his name mentioned," I replied.

"May I just have a look at the thing?" said Jacobi.

I could not very well refuse; and besides, Jacobi was no great judge, and the light was none

too good. But I should have been sorry to let Parmenter have my masterpiece in his hand.

Jacobi examined the medallion closely, especially at the edge, turned it over, weighed it in his hand, and finally looked up at me with an eagerness that he strove vainly to conceal.

"I'll give you twenty pounds for it," said he.

"Why," I exclaimed, "Mr. Par—I mean my client—is ready to give thirty if it's all right; that is, if it's a true copy."

"Look here," said Jacobi: "I'll give you fifty. I'd like to have it, and that's the truth."

"If old Par—my client—won't give more than that, you shall have it," I said. "I can't go back on my promise, you know."

He didn't know anything of the kind. He was furious with disappointment, and positively sweating with eagerness; and it took me close to half an hour to get the medallion out of his hands. When he finally departed, cursing audibly, he left me outwardly apologetic, but inwardly triumphant. For he had gorged the bait, and was fairly on the hook.

I was so pleased with myself that , when Judith came in about six o'clock, accompanied by an elderly woman, I proposed a little supper to celebrate my accession to office. She accepted gladly, for she had a proposition to make in connection with the elderly lady, whom she wished to engage as housekeeper, and whose services to me she proposed to exchange for the use of the kitchen. This arrangement suited me exactly. It solved the difficulty of leaving the house empty, and provided a chaperon for Judith. And it was particularly opportune just now, since I had decided not to leave the house for a moment until the medallion was disposed of.

Accordingly, I handed Judith a sovereign. It was the "last of the flock," as a matter of fact, but I disbursed it with a light heart—there were plenty more in Jacobi's bank—and bade her go forth and purchase the materials for the feast. And while she was gone I studied her lamented papa's very remarkable ledger; and Rachel, the new housekeeper, laid the cloth in the front room.

I look back on that supper with retrospective relish. It was a simple affair—and Judith did it uncommonly cheaply, too—just a matter of a few oysters, a galantine, pate-de-foie-gras, a few sweet trifles, a scrap of Roquefort, and a bottle of inexpensive champagne. But youth and high spirits are better than costly dishes, wit and gaiety than rare vintages. And we did it in style, too. The flowers were stuck in antique silver vases,

the viands set out on Sevres porcelain and Sheffield plate. We quaffed the foaming wine from Venetian *tazze,* we drank our coffee out of priceless Nankin cups, and Judith licked up the last drop of chartreuse, with daintily protruded tongue, from the bottom of an exquisite Bohemian glass.

The supper went off with great eclat, and the time sped apace with joyous babble and harmless mirth. Badinage and swift repartee flew back and forth across the little table—it was a Cromwellian "gateleg" and nearly dislocated my kneecap with one of its incalculable legs—and Judith enriched the entertainment with one or two anecdotes that threw a curious sidelight on the business methods of her late papa, and incidentally proved that the lady herself was "not born yesterday," as the saying has it. Indeed, Miss Lyon was an excellent comrade: gay, sensible, as witty as she was handsome, and totally free from coquetry.

The lantern clock, that dangled its weight from a bracket on the wall, struck twelve; I had set it going in the morning. Judith rose and shook the crumbs from her lap.

"Time's up," said she, in her business-like way. "I've had a jolly evening, and, if I put you on to a good deal, you must give me another. I'll wash up the things in the morning."

I was about to make one of my suave and tactful rejoinders when the interruption came. I had been half expecting it; had, in fact, been on the *qui vive* all the evening. And now it had come.

"Listen!" I exclaimed; and then I turned out the gas.

A stealthy sound came from the lobby by the side entrance; the click of a cautiously opened latch, and the soft creak of door-hinges. I stole out by the hall to the door of the back room, with Judith close to my side. She was not particularly nervous, she only wanted to hold my hand, and I didn't mind that. As the opposite door of the room opened stealthily, we each applied an eye to one of the spy-holes.

"Goodness gracious!" whispered Judith. "It's Mr. Jacobi!"

It was. I had half expected him to come; in fact, I had left the sidedoor unbolted on the chance. And here he was with an electric lantern in one hand and a small bunch of keys in the other, stealing on tiptoe towards the cabinet.

His face was haggard with eagerness and terror—a very devil of a face—and the hands that carried the lantern shook so that the light danced up and down the wall. He made for the cabinet without a sound, and

forthwith fell to trying his keys one after the other. It must have been a poor lock, for the fourth key opened it. The glazed door swung back with an audible creak, and a shaking hand reached in and clutched the medallion.

As Jacobi shut the cabinet, I sprang into the room. He turned like lightning, with a shrill, whinnying scream of terror, but I had him by the throat in an instant, and Judith, who had followed me, snatched the medallion from his hand and laid it on the table.

"Will you please light the gas, Miss Lyon?" I said. "And then perhaps you wouldn't mind fetching a constable."

"Oh, don't do that!" bleated Jacobi, who had sunk, half fainting, on a most uncomfortable Queen Anne chair. "Don't go away, Miss Lyon. I am sure we can—er—arrange this – ha – this little affair."

"Little affair, eh!" I exclaimed. "You won't find it a very little affair at the Old Bailey. And you are proposing that I shall compound a felony. No, Mr. Jacobi, that won't do."

"Now, don't be hasty, Mr. Croker," gasped Jacobi. "Don't, sir, I beg you. You know I was anxious to purchase this—this excellent forgery. That was all I wished, I assure you."

"Do you generally do your shopping after midnight, with the aid of dark-lantern and a jemmy?" I inquired.

"Yes, I know," said Jacobi, mopping his pale face with his handkerchief; "it does look irregular, I admit it. But, if you will overlook the—er—the—informality, so to speak, and allow me to treat for the purchase—it would—er—in fact, I should—"

As his speech petered out into a tremulous mumble, Judith whispered in my ear: "Let him buy the thing, and put the screw on—*hard*."

Oh, woman, woman!

"What do you offer?" I demanded judicially.

"I'll give you a hundred pounds—down," said Jacobi eagerly. "I've got a blank check in my pocket."

"A hundred!" I exclaimed scornfully. "Why, my other client has already offered two! And I have refused him. I think of sending the thing to Christie's."

Jacobi arose in sudden wrath.

"Old Parmenter is a thief!" he exclaimed. "And a liar too! I left him at the club only half an hour ago, and the old villain swore he knew nothing about it."

"Neither did he," said I, rather taken aback. "Parmenter's not my client. Did you tell him what medallion it was?"

"Not me," replied Jacobi. "He pretended not to know, so I

didn't tell him. But look here, Mr. Croker: what will you take? Will you close if I spring two-fifty? That's a large sum, and more than the thing is worth; but I want it, and I'm willing to pay. Come, now, two fifty, cash down." He made as if to take out his pocketbook, and I wavered. It certainly was a large sum, and still more certainly was more than the thing was worth. But—

The side-door banged (Jacobi must have left it ajar); the house trembled to elephantine footsteps in the lobby, the door flew open, and disclosed a fresh visitor.

It was old Parmenter.

My patron stared from one to another like a man in a dream, then walked slowly into the room, the picture of astonishment and suspicion. Suddenly he observed the medallion lying on the table; and when he saw what it was I thought his eyes would have dropped out onto the floor.

"Lord save us!" he gasped. "It's the lost medallion—or rather a copy of it," he added quickly with the collector's instinctive caution. "Where did you get it, Danby?"

"Out of stock," I answered calmly.

"The stock!" he shouted. "Then it's mine!"

"No; I'm hanged if it is," said I. "The stock is mine, absolutely."

"Of course it is," said Jacobi; "and you have just accepted my offer."

"No, I haven't," I replied. "I was considering—"

"But I'm entitled to the first refusal," said Parmenter. "Didn't you —"

"No, he didn't!" bawled Jacobi. "I was here first, and I —"

"Now, you know, you can't both have it," Judith interposed. "Be reasonable. I'll tell you what," she added, turning to me: "we'll sell it by auction."

It was a stroke of genius — an inspiration. I picked up the medallion, and, as Judith clapped a spinning stool on top of the harpsichord, with a little buhl cabinet before it for a desk, I snatched up a steel mace and climbed onto the "rostrum."

"Now, gentlemen," said I, tapping the top of the cabinet with the handle of the mace, "take your seats, if you please."

The two collectors sank gloomily into a pair of corkscrew-legged chairs, and glared at me silently. I passed the medallion down to Judith, and when she had exhibited it tantalizingly before the eyes of the "bidders," I opened the proceedings.

"Lot 1, gentlemen. A remarkably fine and well-preserved copy of the famous 'Brazen Serpent' medallion of that immortal mastercraftsman and moral expositor Benvenuto Cellini, ex-

quisitely wrought by an unknown artist in the very finest silver imported for the purpose direct from the mines of Peru. What shall we say for this fine work of art, gentlemen? This unique and beautiful reproduction of the master's handiwork? Shall we say a thousand pounds?"

I named this sum in a spirit of facetiousness. Imagine my astonishment when Parmenter rapped out:

"Eleven hundred!"

"Twelve!" said Jacobi promptly.

"Thirteen!"

"Fourteen!"

My head swam. My senses reeled. I could hardly believe my ears. The room seemed to float about before my eyes. And still the monotonous voices told out the incredible sums, growing moment by moment more fabulous; and still the two collectors sat like graven images with "practicable" jaws, and Judith, in a flush of ecstasy, stalked to and fro, flourishing the medallion and chirping triumphantly. "Lot 1, gentlemen!"

It was beyond belief. I felt myself on the verge of hysterics. I wanted to shout with laughter. It was only when the price had mounted well over two thousand pounds that I suddenly came to my senses. For I realized, in an instant of reflection, that I must not knock the masterpiece down to Parmenter. I could not let him in. And the bids were coming more slowly now. I must be on my guard.

"Two thousand four hundred!" said Parmenter.

There was a pause. Had I lost the chance, after all? A cold chill ran down my back at the dreadful thought. I raised the mace, and looked steadily at Jacobi.

"Two thousand four hundred bid, gentlemen," said I. "Going at — "

"Two thousand five hundred!" exclaimed Jacobi, leaning forward with starting eyeballs.

Parmenter's mouth opened; but before he could utter a sound I brought down the mace on the little cabinet with a crash that ruined it for ever.

Parmenter leaped to his feet.

"This is a conspiracy!" he shouted. "The lot was not sold fairly; you knew I was about to bid. I demand that the lot shall be put up again."

"I can't do that Mr. Parmenter," I said. "The lot is knocked down to Mr. Jacobi, and when I have his receipt for it and his check, the property will be handed to him."

The check was already drawn as I spoke; and I myself wrote out, on a sheet of headed paper, a receipt for "a copy, in silver, of Cellini's 'Brazen Serpent' me-

dallion," mentioning the price paid. Meanwhile, old Parmenter stamped up and down the room like and infuriated mammoth, to an infernal accompaniment of china dogs, shepherdesses, Venetian glass and pottery, which rattled down from the shelves like the thunderbolts of Sodom and Gomorrah. He continued his destructive perambulations even after Jacobi, having signed the receipt, and delivered up the check, had snatched the medallion from Judith's hand and hurried away. Suddenly he halted, and shook his fist in my face.

"You are an ungrateful, treacherous scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "You have broken your solemn promise, and conspired against me with a stranger!"

"I think you'd better be off home now, both of you," said Judith, "or there won't be a breakable thing left in the place."

This seemed eminently sound advice, and, in pursuance of it, I led old Parmenter out at the side-door, and we walked up the street together in silence.

Suddenly he halted, and looked me straight in the face.

"There's something queer about this business, Danby," said he. "Tell me honestly why you knocked that medallion down to Jacobi in that pointed way."

"If you go and have a look at it by daylight you'll know!" said I.

"What do you mean?" he demanded eagerly. "Do you know the history of that copy — if it is a copy?"

"I know an electro when I see one!' I replied.

He looked at me curiously for some moments; then, in a low voice that was almost a whisper, he said:

"Danby, I believe you've been considering those few words of advice that I gave you yesterday morning."

That was the end of my first definite transgression. It was not a warning to sinners. Rather was it an encouragement to further misdeeds. And it marked out my course finally upon the chart of the future.

WEST INDIAN RUM

Anyone who has drunk Vat 19 (or, for that matter, the 140 proof "white" rum also made in Haiti and in Trinidad) will appreciate the unhappiness of the West Indians in the U.K. who look forward to this rum to help them get through the British winters. Two thousand bottles of rum, stronger than that sold legally in England, are being smuggled into England every year—much of it in Christmas gift parcels. Some of the rum, understandably so, comes in bottles marked "medicine", and also in fresh coconuts and in specially soldered "fruit juice" cans. In 1962, 1,800 gift parcels were found to contain these gifts.

handcuffs don't hold ghosts

by Manning Coles

"ALL YOU have to do," said Tommy Hambledon, concluding the discussion, "is to send some of your young gentlemen to Maidstone to arrest this fellow. If he admits it, you—"

"I have," said Chief Superintendent Bagshott. He leaned back in one of Hambledon's large armchairs and stretched his long legs to the fire. "I am even now awaiting news of what happens when they pounce."

"I hope you had the sense to tell them to ring up here."

"Yes. I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not. What shall we do while we're waiting?"

"Turn on the radio," said Bagshott sleepily.

Tommy switched on the wireless set, dropped into the chair opposite Bagshott's, and threw some more logs on the fire. "Cold tonight—" he began, but a voice on the radio interrupted him.

". . . scene is certainly eerie enough," it said. "The walls of

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The headlines of this past year to the contrary, there are tens of thousands of people who will always believe that the wail of Major Walker's bagpipes as he faced the mob in Djakarta—and men such as Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon "of British Intelligence"—come closer to representing that courage in the face of the incredible odds that we came to associate with England in the days of the late War. ANGEL ON MY FOOT appeared in our August 1963 *issue. And now Mr. Hambledon takes an interest in ghosts . . H.S.S.*

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this ancient house seem to exude shadows, if the suggestion is not too fantastic. It is a stormy night, though the weather has cleared for the moment; black clouds are chasing each other across the sky, so that one moment it is bright moonlight and the next the whole scene is wrapped in veils of—"

"What is all this?" said Hambledon in a pained voice, and picked up the *Radio Times*. "Oh. Broadcast of an investigation into some mysterious happenings in an old house in Yorkshire, alleged to be haunted. A ghost hunt, Bagshott. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Not much. There may be such things; I've never seen one. Any ghosts I have hitherto encountered have always been the cover for - 'er - nefarious enterprises." He yawned.

"The sleepier you get, the longer the words you use," said Tommy. "I've noticed that about you before."

". . . long double range of windows above me are all dark," said the radio commentator. "These are the windows which are said to blaze with unearthly light at times; all I can say is that they're not doing it at the moment. Well, that is the picture outside this strange and desolate mansion. I am now going to move indoors to another microphone set up in what they call the Great Hall, and we'll see how things are going on in there."

"Short pause while he gallops across medieval courtyard, up the worn steps indelibly stained with the blood of Bad Sir Roderick," said Hambledon, "and through the heavily studded postern door through which so many lords and ladies fair have —"

"The heavily studded postern door . ." said the commentator.

"Told you so," said Tommy.

". . . this vast apartment, fully seventy-five feet long and forty feet wide with lofty walls running up to a wonderful hammerbeam roof, must be impressive enough at all times; but tonight, by the uncertain beams of our torches, it is—er—very impressive indeed. The walls are panelled in ancient oak up to a height of six feet or so; above that, they are bare stone, pierced by six slender lancet windows. On the other side—Excuse me a moment, I think something is happening. Just a moment and I'll go and find out."

There followed the sound of footsteps and an indistinct murmur of voices. Bagshott awoke sufficiently to sip his whiskey and Hambledon rearranged the logs to better advantage. The voice on the radio began again.

"All lights are to be put out—have been put out, in fact. Sir Alured Acton and Dr. Wallace

Mendip, the two famous investigators into psychic phenomena, have just told me that, according to their recording instruments, a very definite and significant drop in temperature is taking place. For the benefit of those of you who may be without personal experience of ghosthunting, I ought to explain that the first symptom, so to speak, of the onset of psychic phenomena is frequently an otherwise inexplicable drop in temperature. I may say that I had noticed it myself.

"Dr. Wallace Mendip tells me that Sir Alured Acton is going into the farther anteroom to look at his recording instruments there. I was just going to tell you some more about this wonderful old hall. In between each of the windows is set a flagstaff at an angle, each with a tattered banner hanging from it, such as you often see in cathedrals. What a fine phrase, by the way, 'tattered banners.' There's the sound of trumpets in it.

"Well, these particular banners are moving very slightly—of course there's always a draught in huge places like this, and their shadows on the floor are moving too. In fact, I can really only tell that the banners are moving by watching their shadows. The banners themselves are up above me in the dark." There was a moment's pause, while the commentator apparently thought this over.

"It's very curious," he went on, in a voice which gained in sincerity what it lost in resonance, "that things which are themselves in the dark should cast shadows. Yet there they are, moving on the floor, very dim, but I can just see them. It can't be anything else, because— Just a moment. Dr. Mendip! Are you there? I will just draw Dr. Wallace Mendip's attention to this curious optical illusion. Dr. Mendip!"

"You know," said Hambledon appreciatively, "this show is exceedingly well done. I congratulate the B. B. C., I do indeed."

"Dr. Wallace Mendip appears to have left the room, no doubt to consult with Sir Alured Acton. I should imagine their thermographic lines are running downhill at a gradient of about one in four, judging by what I— Here! Who are you? What the— *don't do that* —" There followed an extraordinary bubbling sound..

Hambledon and Bagshott sat up and stared at the wireless set and each other.

"Something's happened," said Tommy in an incredulous voice. A swishing noise was heard, after which there was silence. "Hear that?" added Hambledon. "That was the ghost going away."

"Taking the commentator with him?"

"Presumably, since he's no longer commenting. You know, Bagshott, either this show was put on by someone with an unusually fine imagination, or something queer is happening."

"Give the credit to the B.B.C.," said Bagshoot, relaxing comfortably.

"I'd like to, but these psychic investigator fellows, Acton and Mendip, wouldn't lend themselves to any mockery of spookery. They take it very seriously in —"

"Rigby," said the radio suddenly, and Hambledon started. "Rigby? Where are you?" It was a high-pitched voice, immediately answered by a deeper one at a little distance.

"What's the matter Mendip?"

"The two experts," murmured Hambledon.

"That fellow from the B.B.C.," said Mendip in an irritated voice. "His name was Rigby, wasn't it? He isn't here. He's gone, Acton."

"Perhaps he became alarmed," said Acton, with a particularly pleasant laugh. "It is a trifle eerie here, if you're not used to this sort of thing. Never mind. You didn't want him here in the first place, so why worry? We can carry on quite well without him. This thermograph reading is certainly interesting—look at it, it's dropped six degrees in ten minutes. Will you just look at the ones in the long gallery, the serving-room, and the kitchen? I'll stay here for a time, I think."

"Very well," said Mendip.

"All this listening," said Bagshott presently, "makes my ears ache."

"Listen," whispered Hambledon.

There came again the swishing sound they had heard before, and a faint gasp, as though Sir Alured Acton had drawn a sharp breath. Silence for a moment; then a muffled thud and a rustling sound, and again the swishing noise. Then total silence.

"Don't say it's got him too," said Bagshott, sitting on the edge of his chair.

"Speak, Sir Alured," urged Hambledon.

But nothing whatever happened for several minutes, when suddenly the radio whispered, "Acton! Where are you?"

"That fellow wears rubber soles," complained Hambledon. "He always makes me jump."

"Acton, there's a luminous radiation—Acton! Is that you?"

Once more they heard the now familiar swish and something uncommonly like a chuckle.

"Rigby," said Mendip, justly irritated, "if you think this is a suitable moment for low-comedy

horseplay, I beg to — aughh!" The usual sweeping noise introduced another period of silence.

"I've heard of witches riding on broomsticks," said Hambledon, relaxing a strained attitude which was turning to cramp, "but this ghost appears to wear brushes on his feet. I picture him arriving on them in curving swoops, like a small boy on roller skates."

"You know," said Bagshott, "I am by no means so sure that this is entirely funny. Where is this alleged haunted house?"

"Doesn't say," said Tommy, consulting the programme.

There emerged from the radio the clumping sound of ordinary mankind wearing ordinary shoes, two men together.

"This sounds more natural," said Tommy.

"Well, I don't see nothing," said one voice. "Where's Mr. Rigby?"

"I don't like this place, Bert," said the other.

"Rigby'd no business to leave the mike like that."

"And I don't reckon we should have left the van."

"You've got the wind up," said the first man.

"Radio engineers from the relay van," murmured Hambledon, and Bagshott nodded.

"Over in that corner! Something moved. Look, Bert."

"Oh, shut up. D'you suppose Rigby's been —"

The next second there was a yell that made Hambledon's head ring, a confused noise of battle, a resounding slap, and Bert's voice saying, "Got you, you —" More thuds, and a silence broken by the voice of an announcer saying, in faintly horrified tones, that that concluded the very interesting and successful broadcast from A Haunted House in Yorkshire. The next item on the programme would follow at ten-thirty, in just over two minutes' time. Hambledon switched off.

"I wondered how much more the B.B.C. would stand," he said. "That last epithet shook them to the teeth. Bert overplayed his part a bit."

"You think it was all a play?" said Bagshott doubtfully.

"Well, it was beautifully timed, wasn't it? Due to end at ten-thirty, and it did. I'm still surprised at Acton and Mendip, though.

"I'd still like to know what house that was."

"Ring 'em up and ask, then," said Tommy. "There's the telephone."

Bagshott did so.

"Barebreak Hall," he said, putting down the receiver. "East Riding."

"Oh, really?" said Hambledon in a surprised voice. "That's odd. I know the fellow who lives

there; in fact, I spent a weekend there once some years ago."

"Who is he?"

"Wayland. Lord Wayland. Retired Army man."

"Was the house haunted then?"

"Reputed to be, and certainly looked the part, but I didn't see any bogies."

The telephone rang and a voice, asking for Bagshott, gave him the news from Maidstone for which he had been waiting.

"Satisfactory?" asked Hambledon.

"Oh, quite. He's in the bag. Well, I think I'll go home to bed now, and thank you very much for an interesting and exciting evening. If I hear any more about the events at Barebreak Hall, I'll ring you up, shall I?"

"Please," said Tommy. "I shall be interested, knowing the place —and the owner."

After Bagshott had gone, Hambledon, of British Intelligence, leaned against the mantlepiece and wondered what all this curious business meant. Wayland had his full share of the wild streak which is apt to crop up in Yorkshire coastal families whose forefathers were pirates. But snatching eminent psychic research workers and B.B.C. officials seemed a trifle over the mark even for Wayland.

Bagshott rang up Hambledon next morning while he was breakfasting. "That Yorkshire business we listened to last night," he said. "The B.B.C. called in the police and the Chief Constable has rung me up. I'm catching the ten past ten from King's Cross. Are you coming?"

"I am," said Hambledon. "Naturally. Have you got any mousetraps?"

"Mousetraps?" said the astonished Chief Superintendent. "What sort of mousetraps?"

"The ordinary break-back kind. And a reel of —"

"What the devil do you want mousetraps for?"

"To catch ghosts, of course. And a reel —"

"Look here, Hambledon. This matter is serious."

"So am I," said Tommy, and rang off.

He did a little shopping on his way to the station, where he found Bagshott waiting for him with an attache case and a pained expression.

"Got your mousetraps?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," said Tommy amiably. "And some reels of black cotton and few fishhooks. One never knows."

"I don't, for one."

"Look here, Bagshott. If you put your hand on a mousetrap in the dark and it goes off and bites you, what do you do?"

"Say 'damn,'" admitted the

Chief Superintendent.

"Would a ghost, do you think?"

"Oh, well," said Bagshott resignedly, and let the way to the train.

On arrival at Withernea they consulted with the Chief Constable. The usual steps had been taken to find the missing persons, but without result. Naturally, everyone in the neighbourhood had listened to the broadcast and had noticed the various queer noises.

"That swishing noise," said Hambledon.

"It sounded rather like a curtain sweeping the ground," said the Chief Constable.

"Are there any curtains in the Great Hall?" asked Bagshott.

"No. None. Or perhaps," said the Chief Constable, "it might have been more of a sliding noise."

"Ah," said Hambledon, and looked at him with approval.

"And the hall is panelled," continued the Chief Constable. "But we have sounded and examined all the panelling very thoroughly and can find no indication of any space behind it anywhere."

"The simplest way," said Bagshott, "would be to pull it all down."

"Sixteenth-century panelling," said the Chief Constable discontentedly, for he was an antiquarian.

"I'd like to go straight there, if we may," Bagshott said.

"Certainly. By all means," said the Chief Constable. "I have arranged for a car to be at your disposal. A word in your ear, gentlemen. Lord Wayland—excellent fellow—good family, lived there for generations—fine military record—just a bit difficult sometimes. Tendency to eremitism —"

"Eh?" said Bagshott.

"To live like a hermit. Discourages visitors. Wants tactful handling. In fact —" And the Chief Constable made the gesture of one drinking from a glass.

"Indeed," said Bagshott. "Thank you very much, Chief Constable."

"He goes fishing," said the Chief Constable.

Bagshott looked faintly puzzled, but just then the car was announced, and the meeting terminated.

In the car Bagshott asked, "How long is it since you last saw Lord Wayland?"

"Oh, some little time," said Tommy carelessly. "Doesn't it get dark early up here?"

"Pretty bleak here in the winter."

They drove straight to Barebreak Hall, grim and unfriendly in the cold November daylight.

The house was built round three sides of a courtyard; the Great Hall faced them as they drove in. There was a police constable on duty outside the door—well outside, as Bagshott remarked.

"Don't blame him. He doesn't want to disappear. I think I'll start by seeing Wayland."

Hambledon walked round to the entrance door in the south wing, the only part of the house still inhabited, and pulled an iron handle to ring a clanging bell. The door was opened by an ancient manservant who stared at him distrustfully.

"Good evening, Morris," said Tommy. "Do you remember me? Mr. Hambledon. I spent a week-end here a few years back."

The old man peered at Hambledon, and his face cleared. "I am sorry, sir, I ought to have recognized you, but my sight isn't what it was."

"Is Lord Wayland at home?"

Morris drew back.

"His Lordship, sir, is not receiving."

"He'll see me," said Tommy confidently.

"I'll tell him you called, sir, certainly," said Morris doubtfully, "but my orders are to say that His Lordship is not seeing anyone."

"He'll see me," said Tommy.

Morris came out upon the step again and spoke in a confidential voice. "I wish he would, sir, but I doubt it. Why, he'll hardly see me."

"Really? Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't know, sir, I wish I did. He's been very queer for some days now, ever since he returned from his last fishing expedition."

"Isn't he well?"

"I think he's quite well, sir. He's just—different."

"Oh. Well, go and ask him to see me, there's a good chap.

"I can't at the moment, sir. His Lordship is out fishing."

"Fishing?" said Tommy.

"Yes, sir. Off the end of the jetty. With worms for bait. He dug them up himself, sir, and put them in a tin."

"Heavens above," said Hambledon.

"Yes, sir," said Morris mournfully. "There's other changes, too. He puts his shoes the wrong side of the door. He used to write us servants little notes overnight when he wanted anything done first thing in the morning; now he types them on his new typewriter and I don't even know when it came, sir. And he's gone right off kippers."

"Oh, dear," said Tommy sympathetically. "Well, it's no use my waiting about now, as he's out. Tell him I came, will you, Morris, and I shall be calling again later?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

Hambledon walked quickly away to look for Bagshott, whom he found standing in the Great Hall in the half-dark, watching the shadows growing taller every moment.

"They're quite right, you know," said the Chief Superintendent. "This is an eerie spot, and there's no electric light, at least not in this part of the house."

"Come with me," said Hambledon, taking him by the arm and piloting him across the hall to a small door on the farther side. "I want to show you the view over the sea before it gets dark."

"View —" began Bagshott.

"Magnificent view. Come and look. Right out to sea."

The small door admitted them to a wide terrace paved with worn flagstones and running the whole length of the house. The two men crossed it and leaned their elbows on the stone balustrade on the farther side.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" went on Hambledon. "Practically a sheer drop of two hundred feet to that strip of beach below, and all before us lies the great expanse of the North Sea, dovecoloured in the evening light, heaving so smoothly and gently that one would never — Oh, all right," he added, catching Bagshott's eye. "Actually, though, we've plenty of time. Away below you to the left you can see the end of a small stone jetty, and on it the figure of a fisherman."

"I see the figure, but he's not fishing."

"He has been. With a worm, Bagshott, with a common garden worm in sea water. He is now packing up his tackle to come home; it is getting chilly and will soon be dark. That is a private jetty, Bagshott, for the use of this house alone, and the only way from it is a steep flight of steps which comes up to the far end of this terrace. Two hundred and seventy-five steps, and only two small level stretches to rest your aching legs. I told Wayland—the fisherman has gone out of sight; shall we walk towards the head of the steps to meet him?—I told Wayland he ought to have a lift installed or he'd grow bulging calves like a ballet-dancer's."

"But he didn't, presumably," said Bagshott, turning to pace slowly along the terrace by Hambledon's side. "Who is the fisherman you're so interested in? Wayland himself?"

"The light isn't good enough now," said Tommy, "to recognize a man when one only has a foreshortened view off him two hundred feet below. But I was told, when I called at the house just now, that Master had gone fishing, so I assume this is very

probably he. You don't know him, do you, Bagshott?"

"No. Never seen him."

Presently the sound of steps came up to them and a man came into sight, walking wearily, as might be expected of one who had toiled up two hundred and seventy-five nine-inch steps. He exhibited no surprise at the sight of two men on his terrace; he came straight on and merely nodded to them in passing with no sign of recognition on his face. Hambledon made no movement towards him and the fisherman walked away along the terrace without looking back.

"Wasn't that Lord Wayland after all, then?" asked Bagshott.

"It looked exactly like him."

"But he didn't recognize you."

"He didn't, did he?" said Hambledon, his eyes following the fisherman until he rounded the far end house and disappeared from sight.

Bagshott glanced at him and saw that his face was hard and that there were grim lines round his mouth.

"Well? What now?"

"Give him ten minutes to wash his hands and order tea — unless he's gone off tea as well as kippers — and then I think we'll go and call on him."

Hambledon, accompanied by Bagshott, pulled the iron ring by the door in the south wing; again the deep-toned bell clanged and again old Morris opened the door. This time Bagshott stood forward and handed in his card.

"Chief Superintendent Bagshott to see Lord Wayland," he said formally.

"His Lordship is not receiving," said Morris.

"Take my card to him, please," said Bagshott, and walked forward so authoritatively that poor Morris found he had somehow admitted them both before he realized what was happening. He said, "Oh, dear," under his breath and shut the front door.

He asked them to be so good as to wait a moment and trotted away across the hall and down a passage. They heard him knock at a door and then open it.

Morris returned. "If you will come this way, gentlemen."

They followed him down the passage into a pleasant room lined with books and furnished with leather armchairs and a large desk behind which a man was sitting facing them. He looked up as they came in, and Hambledon studied him intently. Wayland — undoubtedly Wayland. The same colourless hair growing far back from a high forehead, the same fair complexion reddened and coarsened by exposure to wind and weather, the same high-bridged nose, lean cheeks and firm jaw, light

blue eyes and wide, thin-lipped mouth. One ear stuck out more than the other, all correct and exact. Yet again he looked at Hambledon and did not recognize him.

"Lord Wayland?" asked Bagshott.

"Yes. What can I do for you, gentlemen? Please sit down." The voice was the voice of Wayland, too.

Bagshott introduced himself and Hambledon and said that they were sorry to intrude upon Lord Wayland, but enquiries had to be made in regard to the unfortunate occurrences during the broadcast. Wayland nodded owlishly and Hambledon sat back in his chair, watching through half-closed eyes.

Wayland was wearing his signet-ring as usual, that signet-ring from which he would never be parted. No, not quite as usual —he wasn't wearing it on the right finger. He always used to wear it on the middle finger of his left hand because it was rather a large size. It had belonged to his father, a man so big as to be nearly gigantic. Tonight he was wearing it on the fourth finger, as though it were an engagement ring. Well, perhaps his hands had swollen a bit; they looked it. But —

Wayland was talking. "I am a man who likes a quiet life, gentlemen. A quiet life," he repeated, and his voice went up and down like a drunkard's. There was a half-empty glass on the desk. "I don't want people buzzing about," said Wayland, with the gesture of a man brushing away flies. "Buzzing about. Staring in windows. Driving vans into my courtyard. Putting things in the Great Hall. Don't like it. Do a spot of fishing, come up here, quiet evening—glass of something and a book. Quiet life."

He offered his visitors cigarettes. There was a small table, with an ash tray upon it, within Hambledon's reach; he pulled it towards him for greater convenience. He looked at the ash tray with affection; it was a large and heavy one with thick rounded edges.

Bagshott appeared to be making rather heavy weather of the interview. Wayland didn't know anything and didn't bother about anything or anybody, and why should they bother him? Strangers about? No. Not till these wretched B.B.C. people came. If they had stayed away they wouldn't have got lost. Nobody invited them.

"All a mistake," he said. "Ghost fellers want to come. More fellers coming to see to drains. Wrote two letters, no to one, yes to others. Put in wrong envelopes." He smiled sleepily. "Silly; wasn't well that morning.

So ghost fellers came, drain fellers stayed away. Like that." He yawned, putting up his right hand.

"But —" began Tommy.

"Lishen. When you shee-see-what I see sometimes, you won't bother 'bout a few ghost. Hyenas —yellow ones with green eyes— goin' round and round the room, and I always think they're goin' to knock the lamp brackets off the wall an' they never do. Mad hyenas—green and yellow ones." His voice trailed off and his eyes wandered dreamily round the walls as though following some vision.

Tommy stubbed out his third cigarette, pulled the small table nearer yet, and began confidentially, "Sitting here talking to you like this—or rather, listening to you talking to us—reminds me of watching a cabaret act." Wayland's eyes abruptly ceased to wander and focused themselves on Hambledon.

"You know, quite funny and brilliantly done, but it doesn't seem quite real."

Wayland shed his sleepy look completely and Bagshott drew himself together.

"I remember watching one almost as good at the Gypsy Theatre in Moscow in 1947. It was quite brilliant, Comrade Mashenkov, but not as brilliant as the show you put up here tonight. Dammit, you nearly made me wonder—"

The man behind the desk moved like a flash and a gun appeared in his hand, but Tommy was ready for him. He hurled the ash tray straight in his face, cigarette lighter and all, and followed it by lunging across the desk and seizing the gun hand.

Bagshott ran around the desk and hit the sputtering Mashenkov over the head with a paperweight, after which the desk chair gave way and proceedings became confused. The gun fell to the carpet when Hambledon hit its owner over the knuckles with a ruler, and he was kicked in the jaw by way of reprisal. The brawl ended with Tommy sitting heavily upon Mashenkov and twisting his arm, while Bagshott handcuffed the prisoner's wrists together behind his back.

"One more chirp out of you," said Hambledon, caressing his jaw, "and I'll tie your feet together and hang you out of the window head downwards to cool off. Bagshott, charge this man with kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, impersonation with intent to defraud, being on enclosed premises with felonious intent, and anything else you like to put down, including, probably, murder. Where is Wayland, you —you painted scarecrow?"

"Find him," said the prisoner indistinctly, for he had bitten his tongue in the skirmish.

"We'll take him out this way," said Hambledon, indicating another door than that by which they had come in. "It leads to the terrace. I don't want Morris to see him if it can be helped. It'll take a lot of explaining and perhaps, with luck, he needn't know."

The prisoner was driven away in the police car, with the constable from the door of the Great Hall as escort. The constable seemed pleased. Bagshott rang up the Chief Constable while Hambledon reassured. Morris.

"Now," said the Chief Superintendent, "if you would please explain?"

"I ought to start by saying that I know Wayland a lot better than I admitted last night. He works for me on M.I.5., and incidentally is anything but a dipsomaniac; in fact, he hardly touches drink at all. That story is put about to cover absences from home on business. My business. So are the fishing expeditions. When I saw him a few weeks ago he was just off to Geneva to contact one of our men who had some information for us. I don't know where he is now.

"This man whom you saw tonight is a really brilliant impersonator, and used to do impersonations as a stage-act. His make-up is really wonderful too. When I was in Moscow I saw him several times. He was quite uncanny, but tonight's act was the best I've ever seen. It puzzled me; frankly, I began to wonder whether somebody has caught Wayland and doped him.

"It was the hands that gave him away. This signet-ring"—Hambledon produced it from his pocket—"Wayland always wore it on his middle finger. I told him it was absurd to wear a signet ring on his job, but he used to say he could always turn the bezel inside. Yes, but if you habitually wear a signet-ring and your hands are sunburnt, there's a white patch on your finger under the ring. Mashenkov had no patch on his middle finger."

"What I thought suspicious," said Bagshott, "was that he became progressively drunker and yet he wasn't drinking. He didn't touch that glass."

"Yes, a brilliant mimic, our Mashenkov, but otherwise stupid. By the way, there are underground passages here; Wayland told me so once, but I don't know how you get into them. There are foreign bodies in them at the moment, no doubt."

"And the ghost-hunters, if they're still alive."

"They may be held as hostages," said Tommy. "I suppose Wayland gave them permission to come and Mashenkov did not care to tell them to buzz off. It

must have startled the squatters when the investigating party arrived."

"Why didn't they stay below?"

"I don't suppose any modern amenities are laid on to the castle dungeons so I expect they had to come up for water. I hope so, because that means they will have to come up again. We are going to do some ghost-hunting tonight, Bagshott."

They returned to the Great Hall, now perfectly dark. The moon was rising but was not yet high enough to shine in through the windows, which only showed as tall narrow panels of faint light. Hambledon shone his torch on the walls and up to the commentator's "tattered banners."

"He was right, you know," said Tommy, in a graveyard whisper. "Those things are moving."

"What things?" said the startled Bagshott. "Oh, the banners. Yes. There's a draught."

"Several draughts. Come and hold the torch for me. I want both hands free. Now, I think if I were feeling my way about in the dark, I should run my hand along this ledge. This is where the mousetraps come in, each with a loose length of cotton. Listen!"

They stood motionless, but the place seemed filled with tiny noises; a dead leaf scurried across the floor, and Bagshott jumped.

"Sounds as though the damn place was whispering to itself," he said, and Tommy murmured that perhaps it was. "It is haunted, you know," he added, "it really is. Be careful whom you arrest. Handcuffs don't hold ghosts."

The place became suddenly lighter and both men looked up. The rising moon had come from behind a cloud and was shining in the windows.

"Now it's just as that fellow described it last night," went on Hambledon. "Just before the shadows began to move about the floor, you know."

"I've seen more cheerful places to spend an evening in, certainly," said Bagshott, and his teeth chattered. "It's getting much colder, too. Hist!" They listened again.

"Don't say 'hist'!" said Tommy irritably. "You make me jump. I didn't hear anything — much. There, I think that will do." He put his empty cotton-reels in his pocket.

"Where do you propose to spend the night?"

"In here, with intervals for exercise. Morris has got some hot food for us. Shall we go and have it now? Fortified, we shall return."

They came back half an hour later, warmed and refreshed, to find everything just as they had

left it. The time dragged slowly on, with the moonbeams creeping along the walls and the shadows crawling after them.

Just after four A.M., when they were uncomfortably dozing on the hard bench, they felt rather than heard a deep muffled thud. They sat up at once.

"Now tell me what that was," said Hambledon.

"An explosion somewhere. I felt it through the soles of my boots."

They went out on the terrace and looked about them, but there was nothing to see, and Bagshott sarcastically suggested spirit-rapping as an explanation.

The night passed without any other disturbance, human or otherwise, and just before six Hambledon stretched, shivered, and said that the one thing that would save his life would be instant breakfast. Bagshott agreed. "Bacon, eggs, coffee," said Hambledon, coming out of the Great Hall into the courtyard, "sausages — Hullo! Morris is up and about, anyway."

It was black dark outside, for the moon had long set and there was as yet no sign of the dawn, but the windows of the inhabited south wing were all lit up.

They trotted round to the south-wing door, rang the bell and were at once admitted by Morris a coffeepot in his hand and beaming like the rising sun.

"Oh, sir, come in, please gentlemen. His Lordship came in just now and he's quite himself again. He—"

"Lord Wayland?" said Hambledon, and at that a door opened at the head of the stairs. A figure, inadequately robed in a bath-towel, looked over the banisters, and a voice hailed them in most cheerful tones.

"That you, Tommy? Come on up, I'm having a bath I'm all over cobwebs and whiskers. I say, what do you think —"

Hambledon went up the stairs three at a time, leaving Bagshott forgotten in the hall below.

"When did Lord Wayland come back?" Bagshott asked Morris.

"Only about a quarter of an hour ago. 'I'm starving,' he says, 'and I want my breakfast. Have you got any kippers?' Kippers, he says. I'll lay two more places." Morris trotted away, repeating, "Kippers and marmalade," like the refrain of some happy litany.

Hambledon came in, rubbing his hands and humming tunelessly. "Oh, hullo, Bagshott. Lord Wayland will be down in a minute and he's got a story to tell."

"Where did he come from?"

"Out of the underground passages, of course, by another exit. Wayland says will you be so good as to ring up the police and ask them to come in sufficient

force to arrest eleven foreign agents? If they start at once we shall have comfortable time for breakfast before we go into action again."

"Eleven foreign —", said Bagshott. "Eleven —" He strode out of the room, and could be heard giving incisive instructions to someone who appeared hard to convince that he was both sober and serious.

"They'll be here in an hour or so," he reported to Hambledon, who merely nodded and remarked that hot coffee was one of the Seven Scents of the Gardens of Paradise. Morris came in with the breakfast, and Wayland ran down the stairs whistling.

"Glad to see you," he said, shaking hands. "Can't think why we've never met before. What a gorgeous fire! This is the first time I've been warm for a fortnight." He became hospitable with coffee, kippers, and toast, until Bagshott felt that in another minute his suppressed curiosity would blow off with a piercing whistle. Wayland drank his cup of coffee, poured out another, and began.

"Well, here's the story, and you mustn't mind if I talk with my mouth full because this is the first square meal I've had for nearly three weeks. You know, I think" — to Bagshott —"that I went to Geneva. I met our fellow there. He'd been successfully putting himself across to agents on the other side as a high-up British party official who wanted to establish the headquarters of a spy-ring over here. He called me in as expert evidence. I spun a fine yarn about the need for more personal contact between pro-Communist agents in this country and chaps from behind the Iron Curtain. It went down very well.

"I put a story about in the right quarters of a perfectly safe refuge in the subterranean passages of an old house in England —this, of course. It belonged, I said, to a lord who'd drunk himself gaga and thought he saw ghosts and things — particularly things."

"Mad hyenas — green and yellow ones," said Hambledon.

"Yes. Well, to cut a long story short, they swallowed it. They filtered into this country in ones and twos, as tourists and motor-engine salesmen and so forth, and arranged to meet up at a lonely spot along the coast from here, and then contact me. My idea was to get here first, wait till they arrived, and just tip off the military. I reckoned they'd rope in quite a few big-shots. But they were too quick for me. I was in the act of launching the *Seamark* — that's my new cabin cruiser — when they came bundling along and collected me — Mashenkov spent three days un-

derstudying me as the dipsomaniac lord. Made quite a good job of it, didn't he?"

"Only his hands," said Hambledon, "gave him away. And the minor point that he didn't recognize me."

"Well, you can't expect miracles," said Wayland handsomely. "They took me down through the sea-caves, just as I'd told 'em how, and bolted me into a sort of storeroom down there. Then they persuaded me to tell 'em how to get out at the top. It didn't take much persuading because I remembered the psychic research outfit was coming along two nights later, and I reckoned the fun would then begin. So I told 'em the way out into the Great Hall and hoped for the best.

"Of course I hoped the ghost-hunters would catch one of 'em, hang onto him, and then find he was flesh and blood. I never expected that instead of the ghost-hunters catching them, they'd collar the ghost-hunters. Damn silly thing to do, of course; they ought to have known there'd be a fuss made."

"Yes," said Tommy. "Why didn't they just utter a few interesting moans and retire again?"

"For one thing, they didn't know they were supposed to be ghosts; I didn't tell 'em. They thought it was a search-party looking for them, and the popular Communist formula came into action at once: Take hostages. Actually, of course, they lost their heads. I laughed till I cried when they brought their captives downstairs; they put one of 'em with me, a Dr. Mendip. Poor man, he was annoyed. They were a bit short of lock-ups and eventually – last night – they herded us all into one wing, as it were, and put a sentry on what they fondly thought was the only exit. They were wrong, so here I am."

"Do the ghost-hunters know you've escaped?" asked Bagshott.

"No. I'm afraid I thought it wiser not to tell them. I just slid off unobtrusively into a dark corner. They weren't very interested in me, actually. They had their own troubles to occupy their minds. Never mind, it won't be for much longer."

"How do you propose to – er – extract the winkles? asked Hambledon.

"Just a minute," said Bagshott. "You said they came in through the sea-caves. Can't they get out again that way?"

"No," said Wayland. "I blew the entrance in early this morning. Didn't you hear it?"

"That thud we heard –"

"That would be it. I mined the entrance in the war, just in case. No, they can't get out that way. As for how to evict the winkles, Tommy, perhaps you'd like to

persuade them to crawl out on their own pins, as it were. Are the police coming?"

"They should be here," said Bagshott, looking at his watch.

At that moment the sound of transport was heard and the Chief Superintendent dashed out.

Hambledon said, "You suggested just now that I should go and reason with them. What do I do, walk down a long flight of stairs somewhere and begin simply, 'Dear friends'?"

"You needn't even walk downstairs. There is a sort of irregular chimney in the rock — a slit, as it were — I suppose it's a blow-hole actually. It's too narrow to get through, but you can howl down it with devastating effect below. My brother and I found it when we were boys. The top end is under a loose flagstone on the terrace. You lie on your tummy and whisper seems to run round and round at the bottom and blow cold on the back of your neck. Ready?"

They walked down the passage and out to the terrace by the same way that Mashenkov had gone the night before. Wayland fetched a crowbar and operated on a flagstone just outside the library window.

"There, now help me lift this away — and mind what you say," he said, dropping his voice. "They can hear you now. You can hear them answer if you put your head down the hole. Now lie down flat, that's right. Carry on, operator."

Tommy Hambledon arranged himself as comfortably as was consistent with granite flagstones in several degrees of frost, put his head over the hole, which looked like a petrified rabbit-hole, and began in a deep mysterious voice: "Comrades!"

He paused and craned downwards, listening. A confused babble of sound came up, as of a number of people all exclaiming together followed by one loud voice saying, "Silence!"

"Silence!" echoed Hambledon. "Here is a warning. Listen carefully. You are all lost. You heard the seaward passage blown in some hours ago. The other passage, that leading to the Great Hall, is also mined." He paused to let this sink in, and then kindly repeated it in case any of it had been missed.

"It is an outrage!" said the voice from below. "An inhuman, barbaric, uncivilized outrage!" There was a small tripping echo which ran after the words, whispering, "Outrage! Outrage!" in a thin voice.

"*Papalste!* You have one chance for life. You have fifteen minutes in which to give yourselves up. You will proceed—"

"You forget," said the voice,

"you forget. We have hostages."

"Hostages, stages, tages," whispered the echo.

"Hostages," said Hambledon, and laughed. "Hostages won't save you. They can't hold the roof up when the mines explode. Hostages, indeed!" he went on, his voice rising to a roar. "Hostages, ho! ho! Hostages!"

He waited a moment, but there was no articulate reply.

"These are your orders," went on Hambledon. "Proceed at once to the exit panel in the Great Hall. The hostages will come out first, unharmed. You will follow closely and come out with your hands up. Do this, and you may live. Disobey and die."

A moment's pause, and the same voice came up from the caves. "We surrender. We will come."

Tommy rose from the flagstones, dusting himself down and rubbing his chilled hands.

"I haven't enjoyed myself so much since I was the Demon King at a village pantomime in aid of the Sunday School Annual Outing," he said, turning carefully away from the gaping hole. "I was eleven. That was where that 'ho! ho!' business came from."

"Sounded like it," said Wayland. "Better come in and warn the escort in the hall now. I bet our friends down below won't be fifteen minutes. They can do it in five if they run."

He led the way into the Great Hall, now cleared of Hambledon's impedimenta, though one of the constables was furtively sucking a finger. Grey daylight filled the place, which looked cold and grim enough but no longer ghostly. Bagshott was talking to the Chief Constable, who at the same time was keeping a keen eye on about two dozen policemen. They all looked round as Lord Wayland entered with a hand on Hambledon's shoulder.

"They have decided to surrender," said Wayland. "Mr. Hambledon persuaded them. It is just as well; it will save a lot of trouble." He crossed the room to a panel at the far end.

"Line up, men,' said the Chief Constable. "Each side of that panel. Truncheons ready."

Lord Wayland did something to the panel so quickly that even Hambledon, close beside him did not see what happened. He pushed, it slid back, and something large and inert fell out.

"That's why your tapping didn't sound hollow," said Wayland, kicking the mattress out of the way. One of the young constables, who had thought it was a corpse, drew a sharp breath and the Chief Superintendent looked at him sternly.

"Listen—" said Wayland.

The sound of steps ascending

stone stairs grew louder, and out through the narrow entrance poured a dusty group of figures, rather more limp and sagging than the mattress. They seemed pleased, if anything, to be collared by the waiting policemen. Only the last few showed fight.

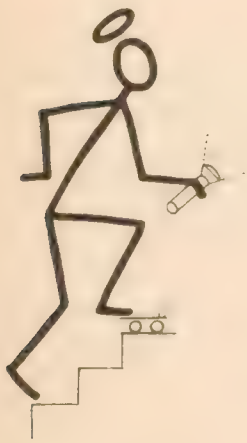
"I," said one of them, drawing himself up, "am Dr. Mendip." A constable hurriedly let go of him.

As the party crossed the hall on the way to the police van, a cheerful burst of music boomed out from Morris's kitchen, followed by an affable voice:

". . . Home Service. We are now taking you over to . . ."

At the sound of the announcer's voice an expression of extreme dislike passed over the psychic investigators' faces: Hambledon grinned. Somehow he did not think they would be inspecting any haunted mansions again for a long, long time.

NEXT MONTH –



FIFI AND THE CHILEAN TRUFFLE
by **ORSON WELLES**

THOU ART THE MAN
by **EDGAR A. POE**

THE HUMMING BIRD
by **WILLIAM IRISH**

DON'T CALL ME FIDO
by **WENZELL BROWN**

SOMETIMES THE BLIND
by **NICHOLAS BLAKE**

and

THE SECOND EXCITING INSTALMENT of

VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT

A NEW SAINT NOVEL by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the February 1964 **THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

LESLIE CHARTERIS'

The saint on TV

Meet Our Female Spy!

When Leslie Charteris introduced Magda, the girl in the episode, "The Fellow Traveller" (based on "The Sizzling Saboteur"), his description was somewhat as follows: "Beauty of a stately kind. . . . a face as pale and aristocratic as a grand duchess, with a broad forehead, wide cheekbones, lustrous hair." To which Harry W. Junkin, scriptwriter of the episode in the TV series, added: "She is, in short, a fifty thousand volt 'dish'. Classically beautiful, mysterious, beautifully dressed. She speaks with a slight, throaty Hungarian accent. The Saint is startled . . . looks at her the way a cannibal looks at missionary."

It is easy enough, of course, for two men, sitting at their typewriters, to conjure up such a vision, but not so easy for a casting director to make her materialize. Unless he finds that an actress like Dawn Addams is available just at the right time . .

Since it all seemed to add up to Dawn Addams, and she *was* available just at the right time, Roger Moore found himself at long last meeting and working with this internationally known actress, Charles Chaplin's leading lady in "A King in New York," who is one of the busiest actresses in Britain as well as on the Continent. "The Saint" marks one of her rare television appearances.

Even before they got around to facing the cameras for their first scenes together, Roger and Dawn were wondering why they had had to wait so long before being teamed. They were able to converse in fluent Italian, to talk about Rome (where she at one time lived), about Holly-

wood, about mutual friends throughout Europe and America.

And whether she really looked like a spy. (She is one in the story . . .) There are of course various schools of opinion on what a spy looks like.

The best detectives are traditionally those who do not look like detectives, and the most

Dawn Addams and Roger Moore

Magda and The Saint at gaming tables

sucessful "agents" are often said to be like John Le Carre's George Smiley, someone who looks as if he couldn't possibly be anything of the sort.

There are obviously no statistics on the subject and testimony in favor of one or another school of thought is limited to the by now dated memoirs of retired spymasters who, in this day and age, never do seem to get around to these more interesting vital statictics. For obvious reasons, there aren't too many photographs available of women who in their time had worked in this field. Willingly or less willingly.

The woman whom Dawn Addams plays has, however, the sort of job in this spy unit which demands the looks of someone just like Dawn Addams. It was a stroke of luck that this tremendously busy actress was available at this time for this role, and Roger Moore, as we said, was particularly pleased to have someone work with him whose interests were so much like his own.

But he couldn't resist asking her, solemnly, as they'd meet on the set: "Had any calls from M.I.5 lately?" (M.I.5 is the British equivalent of our own CIA.) At which Dawn would reply, "Not yet! And I can't understand it! I think I've got a spy face! I must have played more spies then any other actress you know, my friend!"

who killed the drama critic?

by Val Gielgud

When, on the morning of his 51st birthday, Clement Sowerby, that well-known dramatic and literary critic, was found dead in his Bloomsbury flat, a number of people were surprised.

However, it soon became apparent that nobody was sorry—not even his "daily," who had worked for him for 15 years and first discovered his body.

Sowerby had a vitriolic tongue, and an even more vitriolic pen. Authors feared him. Actors loathed him. Fellow-critics hated him —and envied him. No relatives acknowledged him.

He lived alone, excepting the society of a Burmese cat. And he had died — apparently alone — in his gas-filled kitchen.

Investigation of the case encountered one apparent anomaly: few men had provided so many motives for their murder as Clement Sowerby; on the other hand Clement Sowerby had no earthly motive for suicide.

He was, considering his age, almost offensively healthy. His bank-balance was large. His in-

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Val Henry Gielgud, British novelist and playwright and head of Sound Drama for BBC, is the author of several novels including CAT, STALKING HORSE, OUTRAGE IN MANCHKUO, and GATHERING OF EAGLES. Mr. Gielgud, who worked on the scenario for Talleyrand, etc., is interested in military history, "enjoying the society of siamese cats, talking and travel."

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vestments were sound. He was a confirmed bachelor.

The police-surgeon's report stated unequivocally that death had resulted from gas-poisoning — presumably from the gas-cooker, two of whose taps were found full on. Most careful and expert examination of the flat could find nothing to suggest the possibility of breaking or entering during the night.

"Death by Misadventure—obviously," said the Police Superintendent concerned.

"I expect you're right, sir," said Gregory Pellew — then a detective-sergeant — who had made the examination of Sowerby's flat.

"Of course I'm right — so stop looking worried, Pellew."

"But I am worried, sir. The thing doesn't add up."

"Getting ideas about 'the most unlikely person' — the daily help? Is that it?"

"No, sir. That's simply not on. But there's the other stuff in here."

Pellew tapped the police-surgeon's report. The Superintendent shrugged his broad shoulders.

"A gash in the palm of the right hand. Another gash—rather deep this one — on the inside of the left wrist. Some spots of blood on the kitchen linoleum, on the carpet between the kitchen and the bathroom, and a smear of blood on the edge of the basin in the bathroom. A used safety-razor blade in the basin; the door of the medicine-cabinet above it open, with its shelves in disorder; and some bloodstained cotton-wool on the bathroom floor. Doesn't that tell you a story, sir?"

"You tell me, Pellew."

"The fellow tried to cut his wrists in the bathroom — got scared — couldn't stand the pain or something — possibly the razor-blade slipped and gashed the palm of the hand holding it—did an ineffective best to mop up the damage with cotton-wool from the medicine cabinet — went to the kitchen — and finished the job with the gas-oven."

"Ingenious. Might even be convincing if we could find a ghost of a motive for suicide. There isn't one. More likely, and less melodramatic, that he cut himself by mistake changing his razor-blade. But go along and have another look-see by all means, if you want to. The daily help's still there. Sowerby's solicitors have left her there to keep things tidy for the time being. But don't let your imagination run away with you."

Pellew went along. The "daily" admitted him — without enthusiasm, but certainly without any visible sign of apprehension. She led him into the kitchen, and sat down to some

knitting. Beside her chair in a basket the Burmese cat – glossy dark brown fur and bright green eyes – blinked sleepily. It was a very domestic scene.

Pellew repeated his theory of attempted suicide, and awaited reactions. The "daily" continued to knit placidly while vigorously shaking her head.

"No, sir. Mr. Sowerby would never have done a thing like that. He couldn't."

"You seem very positive, Mrs. –Chalmers, isn't it?"

"That's right, sir. I'm sure, because Mr. Sowerby was one of them as just can't stand the sight of blood. He was in here with me one day, when I was washing up and cut my finger badly. Mr. Sowerby went as white as a sheet and passed out. He told me afterwards he'd always been like that from a child."

"Did you like him. Mrs. Chalmers?"

"He paid me well, sir. But as you're asking, like him I did not! He wasn't what you'd call considerate – thought of nothing and nobody but himself. He couldn't even be bothered to let me know when he was going away for the week-end so that I could come in and feed the cat. That's the sort of man he was."

She went on knitting. Pellew excused himself and went into the book-lined sitting-room, glancing into the bathroom on the way. He sat down; lighted a pipe; and considered.

Could there, after all, be something in "the most unlikely person" theory? Was it possible that behind her placidity and her fattish face Mrs. Chalmers had concealed– was still concealing–an accumulation of vindictiveness and hatred for her employer?

Could Sowerby have cut himself, changing his razor-blade as the Super had suggested? Could he have fainted at the sight of blood? Could Mrs. Chalmers have found him unconscious in the bathroom, dragged him into the kitchen, and turned on the gas-taps?

It was not physically impossible. She was a sturdy type of woman, used to hard work, while Sowerby had been thin and a lightweight. All the same– it might be true that a man could no more be a hero to his daily-help than to his valet, but it was a monstrously far cry from that to murder.

He went back to the kitchen.

"Tell me, Mrs. Chalmers, do you know of anyone who might have had a special grudge against Mr. Sowerby for any reason?"

"I can't say as I do, sir. I read some of the things he wrote– he'd read them aloud to me sometimes, not that I'd understand the half of it. But the

things he said about some of those theatricals—cruel's not the word. You couldn't blame them if they bore a grudge. But there was no one special as I know of."

"You were never here when he quarrelled with anyone?" persisted Pellew.

Mrs. Chandler looked up at him shrewdly.

"I'd say, sir, that Mr. Sowerby was the sort of man who preferred quarrelling on his typewriter."

Pellew sighed. He seemed to have come to dead end. It only remained for him to go back and admit as much to the Super. He nodded to Mrs. Chalmers and held out a hand to tickle the Burmese cat under the chin.

"Better take care, sir. He's uncertain tempered with strangers —"

The warning came too late. As Pellew stooped over the basket the cat struck upwards suddenly at his face. Automatically Pellew covered his face with one hand; and leaned backwards. Blood trickled down over his fingers from a deep jagged slash in his palm.

"There now — I'll get some cotton wool and TCP for you in a minute, sir."

Pellew did not answer. He was watching the cat, which had stretched himself with conscious elegance, and now jumped lightly on to the top of the stove. Then, with beautifully controlled dabbing movements of one paw — as though fishing — he patted the two gas taps from OFF to ON.

"And if anyone ever repeats that yarn to you that cats can't smile," said Pellew later to the Superintendent. "I hope you'll call him a liar."

R.I.P.

As this issue was being prepared for the printers, we read that our friend and one-time contributor, Jean Cocteau (*The Saint in Modern Art*, SMM, July 1962) had gone to take his final place with the immortals.

The English newspaper in which I first read the sad news of his departure ran an excellent eulogy, coupled with another on Edith Piaf, the singer, who died on the same date, under the linking headline WORLD LOSES TWO GREAT ARTISTS IN A DAY.

But overshadowing it, across the top of the page a banner headline in type twice as large announced DOWNFALL OF STAR'S HUSBAND, leading to the story of a vaudeville theater manager who had been sentenced to five years for fiddling with the take.

L.C.

mud in the devil's eye

by S. A. Fay

In my job you have to be tough. At best, there's at least one party who doesn't think too much of you; at worst, all sides of the affair would just as soon you were dead. Not so bad in itself, but it's not a business where people always stop with wishing. Somewhere in the middle comes the job where you're taking care of both yourself and some other character who has bad enemies. When I say bad enemies, I mean the kind that are inclined to do something about it. Good enemies are the ones who just think.

It was this kind of job — the middle kind — I was doing. A bodyguard, to put it simply. I wasn't sure just how it was going to develop; maybe into nothing, if I was lucky. On the other hand, I'm not often lucky, so I was expecting trouble. I can handle myself all right; as I said, you have to be tough, and I make a practice of being tough. But to tell the truth I don't like trouble any better than I did before I was tough. Which is too bad. I get more of it.

So it started with my standing in the airport, expecting trouble.

We do not know whom S. A. Fay is, but we prophesize an interesting future for this writer. His (her ?) people have that zany quality which is all too infrequent in this field. As for our hero—not the private eye who tells the story, but the real hero . . . we look forward to meeting him again! Very soon.

The plane from Paris was unloading; I was checking out the passengers as they came through customs — looking for my body, of course. It wasn't hard to pick. Returning American tourists were all very obviously returning American tourists; on the other hand the French were just as obviously French. There were only five for me to wonder about. One was a classy looking doll, probably a model. It was a good body, but unfortunately not mine. Another was a short black-haired dame who must have been a French teacher, and a third was a shaggy, grey-haired musician type. That left two men — a very tiny, fussy, middle-aged guy and — by process of elimination — Charles de Cahusac. De Cahusac, and what he had with him, were, as of that moment, my responsibility.

From the looks of him you wouldn't guess de Cahusac was carting around a small fortune. He was a standard-sized Frenchman, about twenty-six years of age, with a long, brown face, high cheekbones, and a finely cut — though slightly hooked — nose. His clothes were elegant almost to the point of being affected, and he carried a slender, gold-headed cane. I started toward him with a feeling in my stomach you could only appreciate if you've been a detective assigned to body-guard a guy with a slender, gold-headed cane. Right there I felt dicouraged.

"Charles de Cahusac?"

"Monsieur?"

"You are Charles de Cahusac?"

"Who I am, monsieur," he said with a flash of teeth, "is something I do not necessarily tell the first person who asks me." His English was good, if maybe a bit entangled. I couldn't blame him for being cagey, considering what he was carrying. I held my hand out as if to shake, turning it just enough so my ring finger was plainly visable.

"Mr. de Cahusac, if you'll look at my hand I think you'll recognize the ring I'm wearing. It's your uncle's. My name is Clar Gragen; I was hired by your cousins and your uncle to make sure you get the rest of the way safely. They were afraid some one might have found out about what you have with you. I'd rather not attract attention by showing any further identification here; your cousin Editha said this would be enough."

"Indeed, monsieur," he grasped my hand heartily, "the de Cahusac ring is sacred; it would leave the finger of the head of the family only in an emergency, and with one he could trust. I hope, monsieur, I have not offended you?"

"Not at all. Now if you'll come

with me, Mr. de Cahusac, we'll go right to your uncle's office and get rid of that thing. You have it with you?"

"I assure you, monsieur, it is not in my baggage."

"Then come on; my car's outside. And don't worry—if there's any funny business, I'll handle it."

"Monsieur," he said, with another flash of very white and even teeth, "I have been handling my own—as you say, funny business—for some time. It is considered something of a tradition in my family. I appreciate your assistance —"

"Mr. de Cahusac," I broke in, "don't forget you don't know the country."

"Monsieur Gragen, do not forget the country does not know me."

All this didn't make me feel any better. Having the guy convinced he could take care of himself wasn't going to make my job easier; especially since, from the looks of him, he'd be a complete loss in case of trouble. If you are wondering what all the fuss was about, this character had, somewhere on his person, a hunk of jewelry worth a good many years of my salary — of yours too probably. I don't know much about stones except that they cause a lot of agony and make a lot of detective jobs. However I do know a black pearl is supposed to be quite something. De Cahusac was half-heir to what was evidently a very famous black pearl indeed. It had a fancy name which kept slipping my memory, and was supposed to have been in his family for generations. Now the time had come when they had decided to turn it into ready cash; so Charles de Cahusac, who represented the older branch, was trotting it over to his uncle Jacques de Cahusac, who was the younger branch but head of the family now that Charles' father had died — or maybe it was vice-versa. Anyway Jacques was an art dealer type and he had the buyer. So over came Charles. They were going to sell and split the profits. I was in the picture because I know Charles' something-or-other cousin Editha and her husband Gene. When those two heard the story they talked Uncle Jacques into hiring protection; then they talked me into being that protection. Which brings me back to Charles and myself in my car, following Editha's complicated directions to Uncle Jacques' office—and doing our damnest to shake any tail. That is I was doing my damnest. Charles was admiring the scenery.

In a way I wasn't expecting anything; and in a way, after

listening to the fuss Editha had been putting up, I was surprised when I didn't get anything. By the time we reached the office I would have sworn myself silly that no one had followed us, and there were no suspicious characters hanging around the building itself. In fact there were no characters, period. It was a dead time of day and for the moment it looked like a dead job as well.

The office was on the fourth floor. It reeked dignity, from the quiet brass name plate to the rather stark furnishings. Himself was waiting for us in the outer office, and he pounced upon his nephew with a rush of French enthusiasm. Jacques was a bigger man than Charles, and even browner, with the same type of jet black hair and a handsome black beard to go with it. He carried on as if we had just fought our way, unarmed, through the Amazon; and I have a feeling he'd have kissed Charles on both cheeks if he had thought he could get away with it. Finally he condescended to notice me.

"Mr. Gragen," he said, wringing my hand with only slightly less enthusiasm than he had for his nephews, "Mr. Gragen I am delighted at last to meet you. I have heard so much from Editha and Gene of your adventures. I can not tell you how much I appreciate your help in this affair!"

Since he was going to express that appreciation in money I didn't much care if he fell down on the words — not that I told him so, of course. He fussed for a little while longeer and finally sat us on two extremely uncomfortable modern chairs and got down to business.

"Our buyer should be here very shortly, Charles. We are most fortunate in the price — most fortunate. It is now not so easy to find such buyers. Before he comes I wish to check the Devil's Eye, of course." That was its name — I knew I'd remember it. "You realize," he went on, "I am pledging my professional honor as well as the honor of my family that it is the real thing. It is up to me to guarantee it. I have the equipment in the other room—Charles would you mind coming in with me for a few minutes? If Mr. Gragen will excuse us?"

I would not have; as far as I was concerned I was still bodyguarding Charles, and where his body went I went too. However the question was never actually put to the test.

"Monsieur," the younger de Cahusac said calmly, "without wishing to seem impolite, I must say that not only will I not go into that room with you, but that I should be very uneasy

about acompanying you to any place at all."

"Charles!" His Uncle looked shocked. "I do not understand! Is this a way to speak to your uncle?"

"Most assuredly not. I would not think of speaking to an uncle so. But you are not Jacques de Cahusac; you are pretending to be someone you are not. Pardieu! You must admit I am right to be a little suspicious."

The bearded man did not attempt to do any convincing. Instead, after a moment of rather stricken silence, he gave a sharp cry and hurled himself at me. An instant later the door to the other room flew open and three large bodies rushed through and headed for Charles de Cahusac. Editha had been right after all.

I'm tough, and I can handle myself. Jacques de Cahusac — or the man impersonating him— wasn't much of a job. I had him on the floor, gasping, in short order; I whirled toward Charles, reaching for my gun and hoping, as I did so, that I'd have time to get to it before those three toughs got to him. I hoped, but I didn't believe I'd make it; as it turned out, I had all the time in the world.

One of the three had been leading the others; that was unfortunate, from his point of view. He had no warning. One minute he was rushing on an innocuous young Frenchman; an instant later that slender cane had whipped up and slashed, with wicked force, against his throat. I saw him go down, choking, as I turned. He wasn't killed, but I don't think he was ready for another fight in a hurry.

The cane kept moving in lightning patterns. As the other two slid in they took a couple of vicious cuts across their respective faces. They skidded to a sharp halt. Both decided it was a job for more than fists, and almost in unison grabbed for their guns or knives. I don't know which; they never reached them. That cane cut one across his wrist with a crack that could only mean the snapping of a bone; it then buried itself three inches into the other's stomach. As the man doubled up he was rewarded by a series of lightning raps around his head. He went sprawling. There was a final backhand slash across the eyes of the tough with the limp wrist. By that time, brother, they'd had enough. I don't blame them. If there was something faster and more deadly than that flashing cane, I'd never seen it and I hoped that state continued. I was so enthralled watching I forgot my friend black-beard. Having pulled himself together he took one look at how things were going and literally threw himself across the room and through the door

to the inner office. It slammed behind him and I heard a bolt shoot home. By the time I reached it I also heard the slam of another door and the fading echo of stumbling footsteps. Blackbeard had had his exit planned; only he'd meant to leave with the pearl, and possibly Charles, in tow. He didn't.

We let the three toughs go. What was the point of doing anything else? Anyway Charles had a fit about possible publicity. It seemed the de Cahusacs are a very proud family, and felt even more strongly about publicity than they did about pearls. Which explained why they hired me instead of getting official protection in the first place.

"What I'd like to know, among other things," I remarked as the door shut on three large crestfallen backs, "is how you knew he wasn't your uncle. You've never seen him; he was sitting here large as life in your uncle's office. You take one look and decide he's a fake. How?"

"Pardieu," he said, "it is not such a mystery. You are wearing a ring that is sacred to the de Cahusacs; it never leaves the hand of the head of the family except as now to identify a friend and," with a slight grin, "protector. What would you have? The first thing I look for on that man was the mark of this ring. Instead I see smooth brown fingers no ring has touched for some time. Peste! One does not have to be a genius to be suspicious."

I can't say that last remark made me feel too good; however, my claim is to be tough, not particularly bright. The thing now was to finish the job; which brought the question, where was Jacques de Cahusac? Captive? Dead?

"I would not think they would kill him," Charles remarked without evidently troubling himself much either way. "A pearl is not after all like a diamond, to be cut up and sold in little pieces. The only person with a chance to sell it is Jacques de Cahusac. If *I* were going to steal it I'd do so with the intention of selling it back. Besides, a thief is not necessarily a murderer."

"O.K. — if they were holding him, either they have him some place or they left him some place. Maybe I'd better take a look at his apartment. Do you remember his address?"

"Unfortunately, no. These American addressess—"

"Then I'll call Editha and get it from her. You'd better come along. I want you to stick with me."

"Pardieu! I would not think of doing otherwise!"

As might be expected, Editha almost had a fit when I talked

to her. She cried over her Uncle Jacques and she cried over her cousin Charles. Gene, who might have been some help, was off rehearsing. He was a TV announcer — you wouldn't think they had to rehearse, but it seems they do. After five minutes of French temperament I got Editha to give me the address of her uncle's apartment and to promise to meet us there with the key. Also to leave word for Gene to join us as soon as possible. I hung up while she was still emoting and hurried Charles back to my car. He seemed to find the whole affair rather amusing, which irritated heck out of me. Whether I'd have been more or less irritated if he hadn't pulled his stunt with the cane I don't know.

"You certainly can handle that thing," I remarked somewhat bitterly as we headed downtown. Meaning the cane, of course.

"My family have always been peerless swordsmen," he acknowledged modestly. "Unfortunately the sword is no longer carried. Very good! I make do with my cane. If I am not the best cane-fencer in the world, peste! I doubt there is anyone better."

"You're a retiring type."

"Oh, I am truthful, monsieur."

Jacques de Cahusac lived in a very swank apartment building. It impressed me, and I imagine it impressed his nephew, who nevertheless managed to enter it with an air of barely controlled condescension. Editha lived close by so she was waiting for us; she gave me the key and turned her full attention to weeping over Charles. The elevator boy gave us an interested look and was probably sorry to part with us. I warned the other two to tone it down, turned the lock as quietly as possible, and with my gun in one hand softly slid open the door.

I could have saved my trouble. The apartment was empty — empty of Jacques de Cahusac, and empty of any clues to his whereabouts. If he'd been taken prisoner from here, it was without a struggle. After a thorough search I gave up. The three of us plopped ourselves down in the living room to wait for Gene. Editha kept up a sort of intermittent sobbing. I haven't described her yet; she was an extremely pretty girl, on the small side, with curly black hair and brilliant eyes. Unlike most women, she cried quite prettily. This was fortunate since at the moment she seemed to be doing very little else.

"Poor Uncle Jacques. What will they do to him?" she wailed. "I hate that pearl! It isn't worth it!"

"Perhaps it is worth it to Jacques de Cahusac," Charles

suggested. "It is the family pride —and pride can mean more than life to a de Cahusac."

"It's not *your* life." Editha sobbed. She had a point.

Things were growing increasingly more uncomfortable. I was about to suggest we try to catch Gene at his own apartment when we heard his key in the lock. Editha jumped up to greet him, only to stand, stricken, as the opening door revealed, not Gene, but our black-bearded friend. There were no others with him at this time, but he made up the lack by carrying a very large automatic. My gun, by this time, was sitting quietly back in its holster. Black-beard stepped inside.

"Good-day, madame, gentlemen," he said politely. "I'm glad to find you all together."

"You had the key," Editha whispered. "You had the key! Where did you get it?"

"From your husband, madame. Do not worry," as she gave a cry, "he is quite all right. We just detained him a little while. Now, before we do anything else, if you," he motioned to me, "would please place your gun on the table — very slowly — that's it. And if you, Mr. de Cahusac, would hand me that cane of yours carefully—"

Charles slowly lifted the cane and held it out in front of him. Black-beard, moving gingerly—for which I didn't blame him—and keeping his eye on Charles, stepped over and caught hold of it with his left hand. He gave a pull and the cane seemed to come away with him. I say seemed, because it was an instant before anyone — except de Cahusac of course — realized that only part of it had moved. The handle was still where it had started, and from that handle extended a slim, gleaming blade. Even as this dawned upon us all the blade made a sharp swipe and slashed black-beard's arm, coat and all, from elbow to wrist. The gun clattered to the floor. There was a flash of silver as the blade arced up again and its point came to rest against the man's throat.

"Monsieur," said Charles politely, "it is as bad manners to take a gentleman's cane as it once was to take his sword. And, pardieu! With me, as you see, it is the same thing!"

This was too much for Editha. She gave a little gasp; her eyes closed and she started to fall forward. I caught her, which was fortunate, since Charles was busy at the moment. We must have made quite a picture; me with Editha in my arms, Charles holding the swordcane to black-beard's throat, and black-beard himself clutching his bleeding arm and obviously wondering how all this had happened. No-

body seemed to think of anything bright to say for a minute; then the thief recovered enough to grate out a few words.

"If you kill me," he said through clenched teeth, "you'll never see Jacques de Cahusac again."

"But, monsieur, I have no intention of killing you."

"Or if you turn me over to the police."

"Monsieur, I assure you, I would not think of it. The de Cahusac family would never recover from such publicity. I merely wish to — discourage you, let us say. Peste! I would not think any black pearl in the world worth all the trouble you are putting yourself to."

"Gene — what did you do to Gene?" Editha woke up, pushed free of my arms, and ran toward the man. She would have thrown herself upon him if Charles hadn't caught her arm.

"Softly! We will find out what he did with Gene," he assured her. "Perhaps if we search him—"

I took the hint. This was a job I knew and did well. Not that it made too much difference. We came up with a hotel key, and that's all. The gun, of course, was still on the floor with Charles' foot on it. Eventually I picked it up and put it in my pocket, where it bulged uncomfortably. I would have liked a drink right then. According to books detectives drink a lot. I don't. Maybe I just can't hold it, but if I put it away like some of those guys they write about, I'd never finish a case because I'd never know what I was doing. However at that point I'd have liked a shot, but it didn't seem quite the thing to suggest it. While I finished my search, with the hotel key as end result, Charles was very nicely bandaging black-beard's arm with one of Uncle Jacque's towels. The guy wasn't exactly grateful, but he suffered it.

"Now what?" I asked, as if I didn't know.

"I would say, monsieur, that we visit this gentleman's hotel. Is it far from here?"

"Only a couple of blocks."

"Then perhaps he might take us over, if you walk beside him with the gun. My sword, I'm afraid, would cause comment."

"I wouldn't be surprised," I answered. "It's the first one I've seen — and I've seen a lot of things."

"Peste! What would you, monsieur? As I said, it is not the custom to carry swords now, and it is a tradition in my family. I indulge myself. If I am not the best swordsman in the world—"

"Never mind," I snapped. "Let's go!"

Editha was all upset about

Gene and insisted in coming with us. We walked to the hotel. Black-beard was sandwiched uncomfortably between Charles and myself with the gun pushed suggestively against his side. Everything went fine until we actually reached the room door. Charles had the key; he unlocked it and gave it a little push, then stepped back so I could shove the other guy in first — just in case. At that moment Editha pushed by to get a look. This gave black-beard just the chance he wanted. He grabbed her arm and swung her between himself and me, then gave a little shove that sent her sprawling forward and forced all three of us back a few steps. By the time we had recovered he was inside and we were outside. Editha, of course, immediately proceeded to have hysterics. Charles clamped his hand over her mouth but it took a minute to quiet her, and another to open the door. The key was still in the lock, but a big dresser had been shoved against the door and it stalled us just long enough. When we finally got into the room black-beard was gone.

But the room was not empty. If we hadn't found Jacques de Cahusac we had found Gene. He was tied to a chair and looked in pretty sorry shape, his red hair hanging in his face, blood on his forehead and shirt, his mouth twisted with pain — not a sight for Editha. Oddly enough, this time she didn't have hysterics, but ran to him and in a very businesslike way began to get him free. There was a penknife on the bed; she spotted it immediately and got to work. Women are funny.

Charles in the meantime had gone over to the open window and looked out with interest. I could see his point; it didn't look like much of an escape route.

"How did he get away?" I asked Gene. He shrugged, then grimaced with pain. They must have tied him pretty tight; he could hardly move his arms. He looked more angry than frightened.

"He got out behind my back, so I couldn't see how. He must have had a rope or something, just in case. He seems good at getting away. I wish," grimly, "he'd stayed just a little longer."

By this time Editha had cut him entirely free; she promptly stopped being resourceful and went back to fussing. I think what she wanted was an ambulance, a hospital, and an immediate consultation of specialists. Nobody paid much attention; Charles and I were looking around the room, and Gene was too busy being mad.

The place was pretty bare. We didn't really give it a thorough search, before we had time Edi-

tha started kicking up a row about the pearl and Uncle Jacques again. Gene was trying to explain to her that there was nothing, at the moment, we could do.

"But that awful creature must have Uncle Jacques somewhere! And he won't let him go until he gets the pearl! That evil pearl! They should call it the Devil's Eye!"

"If that's so," Gene explained patiently, "then we'll know when we hear from him. Believe me, we will hear from him. He won't hurt Uncle Jacques — he needs him to get the pearl."

"But Charles won't give it up! Not to save Uncle Jacques' life!"

"Oh yes he will," Gene assured her. "He will if he has to. He will if I have to take it from him by force." At this remark Charles raised an eyebrow and grinned. I have seen many more worried men.

"If you ask me," which they hadn't, but I wanted my say, "the thing to do would be put that pearl in the bank. Right now! We still have time. It's asking for trouble for Charles to carry it around with him."

"NO!" Editha was vehement. "Suppose that man called tonight. He might kill Uncle Jacques if we couldn't give him the pearl! I won't HAVE it put in the bank!"

"Charles?" I asked. The discussion might get rather heated, but as far as I was concerned it was up to him. "What do you think?" He didn't answer for a minute; he just stood looking at the three of us with dancing brown eyes. Then he gave a short laugh, and I had a feeling it was all over but the shouting.

"Pardieu! But you all get excited in this country! You would like me to settle the matter? Very good! I will not put the pearl in the bank, and I will not give it to your friend the thief."

"Charles,—"

"I will not part with the pearl," those white teeth flashed again, "because I have no pearl to part with."

There was a shocked silence.

"Charles—," this time there was something in Editha's voice I hadn't heard before. De Cahusac smiled at her.

"There is no good saying 'Charles,' Madame. Charles, as it happens, is not my name. Neither," he added to make the point clear, "is de Cahusac.'

"That's not possible!" Editha whirled toward me. "Clar, you brought him! You must know—"

"How should Monsieur Gragen know? At the airport he thought I was Charles de Cahusac because I was the only one who could be Charles de Cahusac. I allowed him to think so. Actually, the true Charles de Cahusac is a friend of mine, and a

very prudent man. He thought perhaps there would be trouble, so I — who always wished to visit America — I offered to help him take — as you say, preparations. Or is it precautions?"

"Both. You came instead?" As I asked I went over those four other passengers, who weren't Charles de Cahusac, in my mind. I was ready for his answer, and he knew it, and gave a nod to show this.

"As you have guessed, Monsieur Gragen, I did not come instead. I came with. Peste! It was not so difficult. I came on the plane as an elderly musician; Charles came on as Charles. In flight we changed — I will not, because of madame, say where. Charles came off as an elderly musician; I came off as Charles. One Frenchman — pardieu! He looks very much like another— with an effort."

"But Uncle Jacques—"

"Uncle Jacques is now, no doubt, in his real office, with the real Charles, finishing the sale of the real pearl. The black-bearded man did not bother himself with taking Uncle Jacques captive; neither did he bother himself with climbing — very dangerously — out that window. He is still with us — that one — in this room."

"That's impossible!" Gene almost shouted. "You can see no man could hide here!"

"It is not difficult, monsieur, for a man to hide when he has made of himself nothing but a black beard, a black wig, a towel, and a blood-stained coat. I am not a detective, like Monsieur Gragen, but I too can become suspicious. When I bind the arm of a black-haired man and see red hairs; then shortly after see a red-haired man in a room where a black-haired man has vanished; when I remember the key, and Madame Editha's faint when our — villain — was hurt; when I remember husband Gene is — after all — an actor; when I think of all these things, and how much easier it would be to send a man to a false office than to take captive a rich and vigorous de Cahusac — pardieu! I do not concern myself unduly with Uncle Jacques."

"I suppose you think Gene tied himself up?" Editha asked in scorn.

"I think in two minutes — partly supplied by a very clever wife — a man can hide a coat, wig, and beard. If he can not remove the blood from his shirt, he can rub some on his forehead to give a reason for it. Even with an arm stiff from a sword wound he can slip on make-believe 'bounds' the same clever wife can cut — providing he has them ready, as you Americans say, just in case. And the pain on his face would be real — my

fault, monsieur, and my apologies."

"That pearl is mine!" That quickly Editha gave it up and stood facing us, eyes blazing defiance. Looking at her determined little face I wondered how I had ever believed that weepy, hysterical act. She looked ready to dare anything; I guess she had been.

"It's mine!" she echoed passionately. "Just as much as it is Charles' and Uncle Jacques". They have no right to sell it! It belongs to the de Cahusacs, the family — it belongs to us!"

"Pardieu, madame — that is your business and theirs."

"And you — are you going to tell the police? Tell Uncle Jacques? It wasn't Gene's fault; I made him do it." That I could believe. "I didn't mean anyone to get hurt. And no one did, except poor Gene." She decided to try charm again; her eyes went soft and tearful. "Please don't tell Uncle Jacques. He'd disinherit us just for tricking him about that ring — he thinks I took it to get cleaned. Please! Clar?" She turned to me. I shrugged. So did the Frenchman.

"Peste!" The white teeth gleamed. "It is not my business to carry tales. Especially on a charming lady. The Devil's Eye must be sold by now. If I were you, madame, I would take Monsieur Gene and tend to his cut. It must be getting very painful. Again, my apologies monsieur."

They left; Editha's face was taut with determination.

"She'll get it back," I said as the door closed behind them. "One way or another; that pearl will end up back in the family, or she'll keep trying until they both get thrown in jail — or worse! Poor Gene!"

"Pardieu! What would you have? At least he will not lead a boring life. A man must do something, monsieur. There is no accounting for family feeling. Allow me to thank you," he added graciously, "for guarding my body."

"Yeah. Well, as you say, a man must do something. By the way, what *is* your name?"

"My name?"

"You do have a name? If it isn't de Cahusac, what is it?"

"Why," he said with a grin, "d'Artagnan, monsieur. What else?"

THE 1963 EDGAR WALLACE PRIZE

Munich publisher Wilhelm Goldmann is described as highly satisfied with the response to their competition, this summer, for the best German mystery novel. There were few well known authors — but many journalists — among the authors of the one hundred and forty-four novels submitted. What is interesting is that the two best novels were both written by women — Herma Pruscha from Vienna, and Lieselotte Appel of Frankfurt-on-Main. Goldmann will repeat the contest in 1965.

a taste for art

by Julian Symons

The painting on the wall of the sitting room in the flat, a blend of blues and greens with the sun shimmering through the colours, showed a girl on a swing, her head thrown back, laughing.

Three men stood watching in silence while a fourth examined it. Then the fourth, little Mr. Delauney, said: "It's a fake. Quite a good fake. But it is not the Renoir."

"You hear that, Grott?" one of the other men said. He was an American named John Lister. "What have you got to say?"

Mr. Grott, the proprietor of Grott's Gallery, tall, thin and nervous, said: "The picture I sold you was a Renoir."

"Seems I've been cheated." Lister said. "I don't like that. You can take back your picture. I'm stopping the cheque."

Mr. Grott was pale with anger. "Do that and I shall sue you."

Lister pushed his face near to the art dealer's. He said softly: "If you think it's a Renoir, why should you worry? You know yourself it's a fake."

Julian Symons, poet, critic and editor, author of BLAND BEGINNING, PLAIN MAN, PROGRESS OF A CRIME, BROKEN PENNY, etc., was, for a few years following the war (he'd served with the Royal Armoured Corps), a copywriter and ad executive with a major London advertising agency.

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The fourth man in the room was private investigator Francis Quarles. "Gentlemen," he said, and there was authority in his voice, "let us bring a little logic into this. Mr. Lister is a steel manufacturer, here on vacation. He is making a collection of Impressionist paintings —"

"Just beginning to, you mean," the American said. "And if this is a sample of the treatment I'm going to get, I'll give up right now."

"Two days ago he came into your gallery, Mr. Grott, saw the Renoir picture, liked it, and arranged to buy it. I suppose you told him where it came from?"

"It's provenance was unimpeachable," Grott said stiffly. "I bought it six months ago from a descendant of the Duc de Malherbes."

Very well. Still, Mr. Lister wanted to check on that unimpeachable provenance. He asked Mr. Delauney to look at the picture. Mr. Delauney said it was genuine. Right?"

Little Mr. Delauney nodded.

"That was on Tuesday morning. On Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Grott, you brought this picture personally to this flat, where Mr. Lister's staying in London. How did you bring it?"

"My secretary, Miss Handly, hired a car from the Speedfast Company. I have used them before occasionally"

"This was rather unusual, surely?"

"Yes. But Mr. Lister was returning to America within a few days, and he particularly wanted to have the picture hang in his flat while he was here."

Quarles turned to the American. "You were here yourself when the picture arrived. What happened?"

"I don't know what you mean. Nothing happened. He brought it in, we unpacked it, I gave him a cheque. Then I hung it up over there."

"Did you look at the picture when it was unpacked?" Quarles asked Grott.

"Only for a moment. Miss Handly had arranged another appointment for me. And why should I look at it carefully? I'd seen it half an hour earlier."

Lister took up the story. "I was proud of having it, see? So on Tuesday evening I had some people in for drinks, really to show them the picture. One of them, fellow named Saunders, thought it was a fake. And he was the one who introduced me to Delauney here, mind you. I felt like giving him a good punch on the nose. But he was so sure about it. I—well, I asked Delauney to come along today and take another look. He said it was a copy."

Quarles was looking speculatively at the picture. "It looks

rather big to go inside a car."

"It was put in the boot," Gott said. "I've done it before."

"Are you prepared to swear that the picture you delivered was the Renoir from your Gallery?"

"Of course. It was never out of my sight." He glared at Lister. "My Renoir's been stolen. That's why I called you in."

The detective asked Delauney; "You think this picture is not the one you examined in the Grott Gallery?"

"I do not think, I know. I am the consulting Professor of Art at —" and he named a London college of art. "I will stake my reputation on it."

"It comes to this, then," Quarles said. "The copy was substituted for the Renoir at your gallery, Mr. Grott."

"Impossible. Delauney saw it on Tuesday morning. I was in the gallery myself from that time until I brought the picture here."

"Or at this flat. Mr. Lister."

"That won't wash," the American said. "Tuesday afternoon Grott brought the picture here, and I was in the flat alone until people came in the evening."

"Thank you gentlemen." Quarles moved towards the door. They stared at him. "Aren't you going to do anything?" Grott asked.

"Yes. I am going to think."

"Think!"

"Either you are lying. Mr. Grott, and I should be sorry to think that my client was lying to me. Or Mr. Lister is lying." Before the American could speak, he said: "Or there is a third explanation."

"I know the answer," said Molly Player, Quarles's secretary, when he told her the story. "It's a Renoir all the time. Delauney's not really a professor, and Lister's not a business man. They're a couple of con men —"

"Won't do. I've checked on Delauney, he's tremendously respectable. And there are people who'll vouch for Lister."

"Oh. Well, then, Grott's working some sort of fiddle on Lister."

"Grott's respectable, too. There are shady art dealers. but he's not one of them."

"I don't see what has happened then."

Quarles told her. When he had finished he said: "This is what I want you to do."

The girl Molly Player followed that evening was trim, pretty and self-assured. She took an Underground train from Bond Street to Charing, Cross, looked around when she came out of the station and then got on a bus to Pimlico.

She walked down the base-

ment steps of a street off Belgrave Road, opened the door and went in. There was a telephone box almost opposite and Molly rang up Francis Quarles.

Half an hour later he arrived in a car with a bewildered Mr. Grott. They went down the steps and Quarles rang the bell. The girl opened it.

"Why Miss Handly," Grott said in surprise. "I thought you lived in Kensington."

The girl's face was white. She screamed as Quarles pushed past her. In the sitting room a young man sat eating dinner. On the wall opposite to him was the painting of a girl on a swing, a blend of blues and greens with the sun shimmering through the colours. The young man half got up, then sat down again as Mr. Grott followed Quarles in.

Grott saw the picture, went over to it, said: "My Renoir." Then he looked at the young man. "Why, it's the chauffeur from the car people."

"Not from the car people," Quarles said. "When you asked Miss Handly here to get a car she saw her chance and told her friend. They must have planned this quite a while ago. They had the copy of the Renoir all ready."

"It was her idea," the man said. 'We were going to stage a robbery of the Gallery, but she thought it was clever to do it this way."

Mr. Grott was baffled. "I still don't see how it was done."

"One of the oldest tricks in the world is the one where you steal a briefcase by having a duplicate which you substitute as soon as your victim puts down the one he's carrying. I knew this was just a variation on it as soon as you said the picture was 'put in' the car boot. If you'd put it in yourself you'd have said so.

"The chauffeur put it in for you. He had the copy in the boot similarly packed, and he simply handed you that when you arrived. They're a pair of villains, but you must say one thing for them. They haven't hidden the beautiful thing they stole, but put it on the wall where they could look at it. At least they have a taste for art."

A TESTIMONIAL

"They really looked after me in Wandsworth Jail, and I wanted to show my appreciation. Their understanding put me on the road to my longest spell of freedom." This was the unsolicited testimony of a onetime Wandsworth resident who returned there the other day in a chauffeur-driven hired car, a bouquet in his arms, leaving a letter for the prison authorities. "I leave these flowers for you and your staff of the rehabilitation wing in appreciation of the help given me during my sojourn."

Scotland Yard's reactions to this unsolicited testimonial were not reported.

dead hero

by Lawrence V. Fisher

DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT Archer Baumann had acquired his philosophy early in life, a legacy from a father who was driven by some compulsive demon to his grave at 50 and a mother who was a successful attorney in her own right. The philosophy could be stated in one word: Work.

Archer Bauman, endowed with earnestness and a passion for police affairs, had parlayed this simple formula into a series of personal triumphs in the Sheridan Ridge Police Department. Within a year, it was rumored, he would be offered a plush spot at State City Headquarters. He'd draw additional kudos from the press, additional responsibilities, and eventually ulcers. Yes, Baumann was on his way up. Apparently everyone in the old suburb of State City agreed on this, and approved.

Everyone approved, that is except his wife and perhaps his 10-year-old son, Mike.

It was odd, in a way, that Baumann should have been peering into the third drawer of

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There is no denying that, as a correspondent pointed out recently, much of the strength of this country lies in its small towns from which have come the many who, each in their way, have contributed so much to our times. But no one can deny that also, as the author points out here, there is in these communities all the raw material of the crime statistics commonly associated with our larger cities . . . ***H.S.S.***

---

his desk when his first customer appeared on this particular rain-drenched morning. Because he had been staring at a framed picture of Mike. And Archer Baumann seldom took time for any such patriarchal luxuries.

Now, with a visitor waiting, Baumann slid the picture out of sight, smiled, and bade the gentleman be seated.

The man was fortyish. His face was handsome in an overly pretty sort of way, and his light blue eyes were troubled. He shook glistening drops of rain from his coat as he removed it, and sat down on a straight chair facing Baumann's desk. He was wearing an Air Force officer's uniform studded with service ribbons,, hash marks, and various colorful insignia.

"Lieutenant," he said in a rich baritone, "my name is Harvey—Colonel, U.S. Air Force, Retired."

"Col. Warren Harvey?" Baumann tried to keep his surprise from showing. "My son, Mike, has quite a case on you."

Col. Harvey's eyes gleamed briefly with pleasure. "A fine lad. Real feeling for devices aeronautical."

"He lives for those model planes," Baumann said, and felt a familiar twinge of envy. On the infrequent occasions when he and Mike could get together for a man-to-man bull session, the talk always seemed to turn to Col. Warren Harvey and Col. Harvey's jet planes and Col. Harvey's flying adventures and Col. Harvey's medals. Baumann spoke more brusquely than usual. "I'm pretty busy today, Harvey. What can I do for you?"

The colonel frowned. "I'm not sure. Maybe nothing. Or maybe you can locate my wife for me."

Baumann reached for pad and pencil. "She's missing? Since when, and under what circumstances?"

"Well, I'm not certain she really is missing."

Baumann held the pencil poised over the pad. "Now look, Colonel —"

"I know, I know." Harvey rose abruptly, waving away the detective's objection. "Make sure first, before I take up your time. Well, I'm 99 per cent sure. She walked out of the house last night just a while after the rain started. She hasn't shown up since."

"Can you pinpoint that time?"

"It must have been about eight." Col. Harvey paused, frowned, and rubbed the side of his face with a manicured hand. "She was going out to check her peach trees."

"Peach trees?"

Harvey nodded slowly. "She was afraid the rain might hurt them. They're her pride and joy." He paused, his dark brows

converging. "They're more than that. You might almost say she lives for the damn things."

"You don't share this passion, I gather."

The colonel shrugged. "A tree is a tree is a tree."

Baumann held back a smile. "What then, after this tree check?"

"She stuck her head back in the door and said she was going over to Cornelia Ray's. I offered to get the car out and drive her, but she wanted to walk."

"What is that address?"

"Two-ten East Seventh."

"Your address, Colonel? It would be about —"

"Eleven-oh-four East Ninth, in the oldest section of Sheridan Ridge."

"I remember the house," Baumann said. "Why was your wife going to see this Ray woman?"

Col. Harvey shrugged again. "Why do women usually get together? To gab, I suppose."

"Was she angry when she left you?"

The colonel pulled a loose thread from a sleeve of his coat. When he spoke, Baumann had the feeling it was with great care. "We'd had a minor spat, but she wasn't upset when she left, I'm sure. We'd kissed and made up."

"What was this spat about?" Baumann asked casually.

"Lieutenant, are you trying to blame me for this?"

Baumann blinked. "I'm not blaming anyone for anything, Harvey. You came in here with a problem. I'm trying to help you solve it. One of the issues with missing persons is what frame of mind the person was in and how they got that way."

The colonel's smooth face pinched. "Sorry. Guess I'm overwrought. The trouble was, I wanted to drive over to Plainville to have dinner with an old buddy from the wing. She wanted me to stay home."

"So you stayed?"

"Yes."

"But yet, she herself took off the evening."

Harvey turned his gaze hard on Baumann. "Lieutenant, you're a married man. Do I have to tell you how damned contrary women can be?"

Baumann could have grinned, but he didn't. He thought, yes, contrary, and difficult and motherly and loving. "Nuff said, Colonel. Let me have her full name and description."

"Madeline Courtney Harvey. She's five-five, slender, sort of brown eyes, brownish hair, on the wispy order, and she wears it in a bun. Let's see — last night she had on a green sweater and a blue skirt." Harvey shook his head wryly. "Hideous combination."

"Raincoat?"

"Blue, I think. And a white umbrella and a pair of those transparent plastic rain boots."

"Any physical oddities?"

"Her right hand —" Harvey paused—" it's twisted, like this." He forced his right hand grotesquely out of shape, fingers curled under, thumb pressed flat against the palm.

Baumann studied the hand, then wrote, 'Deformed right hand' on the pad. He peeled the sheet off and rose. "We'll slip this down to the main ofifce and put it out to the boys around town first. She might still be right in State City somewhere."

Moving around the desk, he ushered Harvey out of the office. "Does she often pull a disappearing act?"

"Never. But she often stays with Cornelia."

"Why didn't you check with Miss Ray last night?"

"I tried to, but the phones in the river section had gone out a few minutes after the rain started. When she didn't return, I just assumed she was staying with Cornelia. It didn't seem necessary to get the car out and fight the rain. Then, this morning, the phones were back so I called Cornelia. Madeline never showed up there. I can't imagine where else she might have gone."

Baumann opened the door to communications, handed the information sheet to the teletype man, and walked with Harvey to the main station entrance. 'We'll get on it, colonel."

Col. Harvey licked his lips, and Baumann was aware of something new in his eyes. Was it fear?

One fear, he thought, looks exactly like another. The fear of losing a wife looks like the fear of losing a son. Even if the son will continue to live right in your home and call himself your son and partake of your food and your protection—yes, and your love. Even then, a son could be lost. . . .

Col. Harvey pulled gloves onto his manicured hands. "I hope you can find her quick, Lieutenant. I'm beginning to feel — uneasy."

Baumann spent the rest of the day in a darkened room at State City Headquarters. He and 30 others listened to a gray headed expert from Chicago discuss a series of slides illustrating the subject of coincidence in police work.

At 4:30 he lifted his benumbed rear, walked to a pay phone, and placed a call to Sheridan Ridge station. No trace of Mrs. Harvey, the desk man reported, but the colonel had kept the wires hot all day with his anxious inquiries. Baumann re-set the instructions to all patrols. Then he hung up and climbed

into his aging sedan and headed for home.

He guided the car slowly through the rain, hardly hearing the rhythmic snik-snik of the windshield wipers, or the hiss and splash of traffic around him. He was thinking about the intriguing matter of coincidence.

Carol opened the door and kissed him lightly on the mouth. He held her for an instant, her slender form fitting the cuve of his arms with the familiar closeness of a dozen years of marriage. He felt her tenseness.

He backed away a step and studied her brown eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing much I suppose. Mike's in bed with sniffles."

Baumann's brows jumped up. "Mike, in bed?"

Carol smiled thinly. "Under duress. He isn't really bad yet, but he could be."

Baumann shucked off his dripping raincoat and hung it in the hall closet. "He upset about his paper route?"

"Raging." Carol led the way through living room and kitchen, into the short hallway connecting the three bedrooms. Walking behind her, Baumann thought: A woman of great good sense, a full measure of adult qualities. And then some.

With almost a feeling of guilt, he let his eyes rove up and down Carol's figure. She was poured into a brown slack-and-sweater outfit that matched her eyes. At the advanced age of 31, she was still custodian of an enticing collection of creamy roundnesses assembled in the most delightfully maddening manner possible. Baumann's little twitch of guilt bothered him every so often, when he stopped to ask himself why he had deserved to win this warm and wilesome female away from two other slavering suitors.

Of course, Carol had her moments of bluntness, and of coolness, too. Pausing now at the door of Mike's room, she turned.

"You know, Arch, there's such a thing as a boy being too conscientious. Mike thinks the most important thing in the world is those papers. He insisted on throwing them this morning when the rain was hardest, and now this cold is coming."

Baumann felt a tightness in him. This matter of the boy — the only serious area of disagreement between them — always put him on the defensive. "Maybe the papers are the most important thing now. If he wants to get anywhere later —"

"No!" Carol shook her blond head violently. "Arch, he's going to have years to learn responsibility and duty."

"Sure, but —"

"And besides, most kids don't grow up to be Arch Baumanns,

with the drive and energy to work 16 hours a day come hell or high water or double pneumonia." Carol's chin went up. "Some men want to save a little time for their families. When Mike gets married, I pray he'll be one of those."

Defiantly, she twisted the knob and pushed Mike's door open. "Dad's home," she called out brightly.

An event, Baumann thought. She makes it sound like an event.

He fixed a smile on his lips. His face suddenly felt stiff and curiously mask-like. As if he were greeting a visiting dignitary.

What the hell, he asked himself. You have to put on an act for your own kid?

And before he opened his mouth to speak to Mike, a discomfiting answer sneaked into his consciousness — Maybe you wouldn't have to if he knew you better. Maybe, if there were time enough to be a father, as well as a sucess —

Mike struggled up to a sitting position and brushed at his dark hair. He did not speak. His eyes, brown like his mother's looked a bit puffy around the lids. He was a thin boy, almost delicate in his thinness, but hiding, Baumann knew, a wiry skeleton that would someday match his own.

Mike Baumann would grow up to be a rangy, bone-and-muscle example of raw manhood, filled with a civilized itch to live. And his mind would keep him responsible and competent.

"How you feeling, son."

"All right."

"Mom thinks you might have a cold."

"Yes, sir."

"I said you *could* get a bad one," Carol corrected. She tucked in a corner of a blanket. "We don't want that, do we?"

"Aw, heck," Mike protested, "I feel great. I don't see —"

"You don't have to see," Baumann said. "You just take it for granted Mom's doing right by you."

Mike's eyes dropped. "Yes, sir."

Baumann felt his wife's gaze on him, disapproving of any touch of harshness, he knew. But accepting your lot was a part of life, and so was harshness. The boy had to experience both, and the sooner the better.

"I'll get your supper," Carol said. "Beef broth. It'll warm the tummy."

She whisked from the room. For a moment after she was gone, silence held, awkward, self-conscious, uncomfortable silence.

Finally, Baumann rose and picked up a half-finished structure. The pieces were cut and

fitted with great care. The gluing was neat as the work on a piece of fine furniture.

"This is good," he said. "This is going to be dandy."

Mike said nothing.

Baumann felt silence growing in the room again. In desperation, he turned to a fool-proof subject.

"How's Colonel Harvey these days?"

The boy's face changed subtly. The stolid sense of rejection flowed away from his eyes. "I haven't seen him for a couple of days. Except for —"

Baumann turned the plane model in his hands. 'Except for what?"

"Nothing."

There was a quality in the boy's tone that alerted Baumann. He glanced at Mike and saw that the closed-in look was tightening his face again.

Something indefinable made Baumann say, "Mike, you know Mrs. Harvey, of course."

"Yes, sir."

"You like her?"

Mike's thin shoulders lifted in a tiny shrug. "She's okay."

"You don't seem too convinced."

Mike pulled the blanket higher. "She wasn't very nice at first."

Baumann grinned, trying to ease the boy. "She pull some shenanigan on you?"

"No, sir."

"Then what was wrong?"

Mike's mouth pinched together. He glanced at his father, some painful word of revelation struggling to come out. "We pulled a shenanigan on her," he said finally.

"Perry and you?"

Mike nodded dumbly over the edge of the blanket.

"You'd better tell me about it," Baumann said.

The boy's dark eyes threatened to brim over. "She—caught us swiping peaches from her yard."

Baumann's breath caught. "Mike, I —"

"It was just the old half rotten ones, for gosh sakes!" Mike sat straight up and glared, full of rebellion, an image of his mother's indignant defiance. "They were just there on the ground and the ants and birds were gettin' 'em. Besides, Colonel Harvey said we could take the darn things as long as we didn't shake any down from the trees, and we didn't!"

Baumann's system settled back into tranquility. "Well, if the colonel says you can have the culls, what's the problem?"

Mike had retreated under the covers again, apparently abashed by his own outburst. "I — don't know. I guess it's just that Mrs. Harvey is so wild about those trees. You'd think the

peaches were made outa solid gold or something."

"In that case, you stay away from them even if the colonel does give you the okay. You have to ask yourself whether a couple of rotten peaches are worth making an unhappy lady unhappier and getting yourself into trouble over. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, about this cold. You get it from Perry?"

"No. He doesn't have one. He threw my papers for me tonight." Mike fidgeted with the edge of the blanket. "Sir, I know I'm not being responsible but—could you do it tomorrow morning?"

I know I'm not being responsible — That, Baumann thought, from a ten-year-old.

He swallowed a small lump that threatened to rise in his throat. "You bet. Pick-up at Eighth Street and Tenth Avenue, as usual?"

"Yes, sir. And — thanks."

The door opened. Carol came in carrying a tray with a white napkin spread across it and a a tall glass of orange juice and a steaming bowl. Baumann rose and started out.

"Sir —"

Baumann turned. Mike was gazing at him, his young face bland. "How come you wanted to know about Mrs. Harvey?"

"Just curious," Baumann said. "I got to thinking about her and wondered. Now you eat your soup and get rid of that cold, son."

He caught a brief, questioning glance from his wife. Before the moment complicated itself, he left.

Madeline Harvey was still uppermost in Baumann's mind the next morning when the alarm snarled at him at four. He struggled, bleary-eyed, out of the warmth of the bed, shut off the buzzing monster, and faced his thought for the day. Wives just *don't* spend a night away from home without letting someone know where they are.

Puzzling over this gem of homegrown psychology, he dressed, fixed a cup of instant coffee, swallowed it hastily, and left. The rain had settled down to a persistent, soaking drizzle. Baumann picked up the papers at Eighth and 10th, and started on the route.

At this hour, the only sounds were the motor of the car and the rain noises—the snik-snik of the windshield wipers and the hiss and splash of the tires. Baumann drove up one silent street and down another, delivering to three or four houses at once, folding papers as he hurried up the walks. Street lights were few. Haloed by rain, they gleamed like pitiful candles in overwhelming blackness.

Just before five, he turned into the 1100 block of Ninth. The house on the corner had been empty for some time. The next house was Colonel Warren Harvey's. Beyond stood a dusty Victorian monstrosity occupied by two elderly bachelors, and beyond that a wooded slope dropped off gently to the river. It was a quiet river, a gentlemanly tributary of the Missouri. It never overflowed its banks. Somehow, it accepted the disgorged refuse of Sheridan Ridge's sewers without losing its basic freshness and tranquility.

Baumann parked in front of Harvey's house. He thumbed two papers from the dwindling supply and splashed up the bachelor's walk. Leaving the paper, he cut across the lawn, hurdled a low hedge, and entered Colonel Harvey's domain of the peach trees. He had passed the house numerous times, of course, but he'd never had reason to notice the trees before. The house, a three-story, gabled, porticoed structure was surrounded by the trees. An additional row was set in the parking, close to the street.

Baumann's eye caught a pale wedge of light streaming from a side window. Staying in shadows, he slipped around the house and peered inside. Colonel Warren Harvey stood in front of the kitchen sink drawing a glass of water from the tap. He wore a white dress shirt, a tie, dark blue trousers. A uniform coat hung over the back of a chair. He might have just come home after an evening out.

Out with whom? Baumann asked himself silently.

As he watched, Harvey uncapped a small bottle. He shook out a pill, popped it into his mouth, and drank from the glass. Then he sat down at the table, facing the window, and put his face in his hands.

Fear — Baumann thought. Despair, anxiety, the nervous stomach and sleeplessness of fear.

Or was it?

He started back toward his car. In the street, the gutters were filling. The backed-up water made a small lake in front of the Colonel's house and filled much of the intersection.

As Baumann drove away, dawn was just pushing its tentative grayness through the rain. He glanced back. He could make out the skeletons of the peach trees, like misshapen bony fingers thrusting upward to the turgid sky.

At ten minutes past nine, Baumann was seated in the front room of one Cornelia Ray. On his knee was balanced a fragile plate containing two macaroons and a cup of coffee which,

while not quite in a class with Carol's coffee, was decidedly superior to that brewed by the desk sergeant at Sheridan Ridge station.

"And you say Mrs. Harvey had made definite plans to spend the evening with you, Miss Ray?"

Cornelia Ray fluttered a milk-white hand. She was a small, soft looking woman of indeterminate middle age, one of those women Baumann often found himself classifying as aggressively feminine. The frilly, lace-touched room, the light flowery scent, the air about the place — as if a dozen canaries might flutter out at any moment—made Baumann itch to stand up and run.

"Mr. Beeman, I didn't say *definite* plans. Dear, sweet Madeline isn't ever definite about anything—" Cornelia Ray paused, placed one lacquered white nail thoughtfully against her lower lip — "except maybe about how much she loves Warren."

"You'd say she really cares for him?"

"I certainly would. Honestly, she'd do anything for that man. Of course, you couldn't tell it by being around her. She never stirs up a fuss, either for or against."

Baumann paused, the coffee cup halfway to his mouth. "For or against what?"

"Anything." The white hand waved again. "Warren's little flirtations with other women, for instance. Honestly, Mr. Bergman, that man is a beast. A hideous, insensitive beast!"

Cornelia Ray turned wide gray eyes on Baumann and blinked rapidly. He saw that she was wearing artificial lashes. The itch to run intensified to near panic. He gulped coffee.

Here it comes, he thought. Gossip session. The sweet deadly, confidential low-down. Then when "Dear Sweet Madeline" turns up hale and healthy, this two-faced baggage will indignantly deny spilling her private life.

He tried to sound casual. "What other women, Miss Ray?"

"All of them. Oh—" Cornelia Ray fluttered with both hands now — "I *shouldn't* be talking about this, Mr. Baumann, but she's *so* taken up with that ungrateful two-timer — well, if you'll promise not to breath one teensy word to anyone, I'll —"

"Miss Ray," Baumann said dryly, "I'm a police officer. I'm not out gathering soap-opera sensationalism. This woman is missing. What I need is any information that might help explain why she's missing or where she is. Anything I learn will be used only to find her."

"Well, of course, I wasn't implying —"

"What other women, Miss Ray?"

"Well, there was the Lordale girl at Harkness Air Force Base. She wanted Warren to divorce Madeline, but Madeline just up and visited her one day and told her what was right, and the Lordale girl backed off, believe you me. Then just before they left Harkness, there was a silly-headed little blonde bi — girl, a secretary in Warren's headquarters office. Madeline just ignored her, since they were moving anyway. They were transferred to Vance, and wouldn't you know it, the wife of another officer took a shine to that wretch and before that was over she and Madeline had a fight and the accident happened and —"

"What accident?"

"Madeline's hand. Haven't you ever seen her right hand?"

"I haven't had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Harvey."

"Oh. Well, poor thing, she has this twisted right hand that she got in the fight with the other officer's wife. That hussy called Madeline an awful name and they started to tussle, and Madeline got her hand crushed in a car door. It was ghastly! That girl didn't have any right to behave the way she did."

"What did she call Mrs. Harvey?"

Cornelia Ray's expression stiffened righteously. "I'd prefer not to say."

"Miss Ray."

"Oh, very well, if you're going to insist." Cornelia Ray flounced in delicious discomfort. "She called her a possessive, clutching bitch. Now, don't you *dare* say a word about this, Mr. Bowman! Heavens, if Madeline ever found out —"

"Didn't you think it a bit strange, Baumann asked suddenly, when Mrs. Harvey didn't show up the other night?"

"Why, no!" Cornelia Ray's store lashes fanned the air. "As I've already told you, Madeline isn't any more organized than a box full of monkeys, bless her heart. You might almost say she's sloppy, not only in her thinking but in her personal ways. I keep telling her that if she'd fix her hair and do her nails — you know, primp up a bit more — maybe Warren wouldn't be so friendly with these hussies. But she won't listen. She just says Warren has to love her the way she is or not at all. So I've about given up."

Baumann placed his plate and cup on an end table and stood up. "Thank you Miss Ray. You've helped me a lot."

"Won't you have another cup of coffee, Mr. Bangman?"

Baumann edge toward the door. "Thank you, but I have to get home. My wife fixes early

lunch for me."

"Oh." Ice dripped from the word.

On the steps, just outside the door, he turned. "May I ask how old you are, Miss Ray?"

Her pink mouth tightened. "That, sir, is none of your damn business."

The door crashed shut.

Early that afternoon, Baumann visited the April Flower Shoppe in a busy section of State City proper. He talked with the owner, a cigar-smoking, pudgy, sandy-voiced man named Frank April.

"You have a Miss Cornelia Ray working here?" Baumann asked.

April answered around a wobbling cigar. "She ain't here. This is her day off."

"I know." Baumann extended his shield and identification. April's cigar bobbed rapidly.

"Christs' sake, what's that perfumed idiot done now, sweetened somebody to death?"

Baumann laughed. "Not quite. I was lucky. What I want to know is, does she have any boyfriends?"

"Her?" April snorted. "Hell, she has 'em, but she can't hold onto 'em. Keeps forgettin' their names. She brought a guy in here last week, said his name was Joe Smith. Turned out he was George Jones. Haven't seen him since. I doubt a guy could stand her long anyway, unless maybe he was like her."

"Do you know who she pals around with?"

April shrugged fat shoulders and chewed on the cigar. "She talks about the Harveys—that's some Army guy and his wife live at the old Courtney place out in the Ridge. What's up with her, lootenant?"

"Just a routine matter. Do you know where she lived just before State City?"

"Seems to me an army post somewheres."

"An air force base?"

"Could be."

"The name Vance Air Force base sound familiar?"

"That's it. She clerked in a PX."

"Does she ever mention any other air bases?"

A customer came through the door. Frank April glanced at the woman and tongued his cigar into the corner of his mouth. "Hell, I dunno. She talks alla time. Lootenant, if you could hang around a minute, I wanna get this lady —"

"How about Harkness Air Force Base?"

"Mebbe. With a jabberer like her — Lissen, Lootenant —"

"I know — you wanna get that lady. Thanks, April."

As he swung out the door, Baumann heard April's gravelly voice saying, ". . . and we have

an exquisite selection of *phajus grandifolius,* madam . . ."

By six that afternoon, with no thread-end trace of Madeline Harvey, Baumann wearily left his office. In communications, he was told that the colonel had phoned half a dozen times during the day. The last call had come only a moment ago, leaving the normally patient sergeant muttering blankly at empty space.

Why, Baumann asked himself, is he making such a thing of this calling? An Air Force colonel ought to be sharp enough to know we'd let him know the second anything turned up.

Could it be for a show?

With a disturbing sense of the unfitness of things, Baumann drove home. A familiar car, with the doctor's cadusa next to the license plate, occupied the driveway. Baumann found his wife perched on the edge of a chair, twisting a handkerchief through her fingers. A shaft of cold fear needled him.

"Mike insisted on throwing those darn papers," Carol said tautly. "I knew better, but he kept saying he couldn't run a paper route from his bed. So like a fool I bundled him up and let him go. He came in shaking and absolutely blue." She rose suddenly and moved in a rush to Baumann, her face digging hard against his chest. "Arch, if anything happens to him—"

Baumann pressed his hands against her rigid back. "Nothing's going to happen. What does Doc Simons say?"

"I don't know. He took one look at Mike and told me to leave the room. It's only been ten minutes, but it seems—"

The door to Mike's room clicked, opened, closed. Doctor Simmons appeared, carrying his bag. He nodded briefly at Baumann. "He'll be all right. He's had a little chill. I gave him a sedative to keep him asleep until morning. If he has a temperature or chills then, call me."

Simmons was a middle-sized man, graying, with the authority of competence and experience in his manner. "What's with your boy, Lieutenant? He has all the overt, normally healthy signs of a ten-year-old boy. But he's afraid of something."

Baumann swallowed. "He's been acting odd lately. I don't—"

"Lieutenant," Simmons said almost angrily, "This kid is scared to death! Don't you have any idea what's eating him?"

Numbly, Baumann felt Carol's hand creep into his own. His mind raced, trying to imagine, trying to fight this shocking accusation. He couldn't look at the doctor, nor at his wife.

"No idea at all," he said, and turned away.

But after Simmons had left,

and as the silence was stretching out to wire thinness, he had to admit that a chilling line of thought was forming in his mind. He suddenly walked to the closet and pulled out his raincoat. Carol's voice sounded loud and sharp.

"Arch — where are you going?"

"If there's one thing in this world I'm equipped to do," he said, "it's to find out things about people. Maybe I can do my own kid some good."

She studied his face, then came to him and kissed him. He walked outside, into the gray curtain of rain.

Perry Webb was a year older than Mike, a year ahead of him in school, and an inch shorter. Although Baumann had never before met his parents, he saw immediately that the boy had inherited his father's serious face and his mother's look of intelligent warmth.

"Now tell me, Perry," Baumann began, after introduction, "what do you think gave old Mike the shivers?"

"Well, he walked all over town in the rain this afternoon with his papers. I offered to help him, but he said he wasn't gonna let a little rain slow him down."

"I see. How about this crazy mood he's in?"

"Boy, it's crazy, all right! He wouldn't even come over and work on our new gas model rocket plane. I knew something was funny right then, Mr. Baumann. Mike really likes planes, and any time he won't work on one, he's sick all right!"

Baumann and the Webbs exchanged amused glances."

Perry frowned. "Miss Smith gave him a C on an English test."

"That pretty bad," Baumann admitted. "What else?"

"Come to think of it," Perry said, pouncing on an idea, "he sure acted funny this morning when I told him about Mrs. Harvey. Gosh, he got mad! I thought he was gonna hit me!"

Baumann leaned toward the boy, a dryness in his mouth. "What did you tell him about Mrs. Harvey?"

Perry blinked, glanced at his parents. His father smiled and nodded. "Well," Perry said cautiously, "one of the other kids told me Mrs. Harvey disappeared yesterday. When I told Mike, he said she was probably just off somewhere hiding. Then he wouldn't talk about it anymore, and he just went away and left me standing there."

Baumann searched Perry's bland face. Clearly, this was no fabricated story. It was not feasible that this small chain of events could be coincidental, product of a small boy's throbbing imagination.

Rising, Baumann clapped a hand across Perry's shoulder. "Thanks, young fella. You've helped Mike and me a lot."

"When can he come back and work on our plane?" Perry asked.

"Soon," Baumann said. "Real soon."

Baumann jammed the key into the ignition and tramped on the starter. There was only one possible answer: As the old phrase went in the detective novels, Mike knew something.

But there was a further painful irony than the mere fact he was Baumann's son. The lad was a buddy of Colonel Warren Harvey — and he was being loyal to Harvey, probably, in his indignation and his closed-in-mood of late. The embittering fact was that Baumann himself had lectured the boy on the subject of loyalty.

Baumann laughed, the sound acid against the throaty turning of the engine.

"Can a cop use his own 10-year-old kid to solve his cases for him?" he asked aloud. "When he's sold the kid on the rules and breaking them might tear the kid up?"

And the answer came in the soft, tense pounding of Baumann's fists against the steering wheel, in the bitter set of his mouth . . . The answer was *no*.

Baumann left the house early the next morning, after a brief visit to Mike's room. He found the boy without heat of fever, sleeping on his side in a foetal crouch, his breathing relaxed and normal.

At the station, Baumann called and got Pete Carey out of bed, then fiddled with reports until Pete arrived, twenty minutes later.

"I want you to stake out at Colonel Warren Harvey's house — 1104 East Ninth," Baumann explained. "Let me know if Harvey leaves or pulls any odd stunts."

Pete Carey stood six-three in his corn plasters. He had a face that might have been carved from a chunk of mahogany, and he had a record of honest, competent detective work.

At the moment, though, he was an annoyed, bleary- eyed cop glaring balefully at the electric clock above Baumann's desk. "Jesus Christ! It's only 7:15. What's this guy done — commit a pogrom?"

"His wife's missing," Baumann said. "But the case smells. We've had absolutely no trace of her, and a lot of odd little loose ends here make me think twice. I want you to stay with Harvey even if he goes clear to Siam. I'm alerting the Highway Patrol. You can take an unmarked radio car and use an alternate frequency to keep in touch with

them."

"In case Harvey leaves town, huh?"

Baumann nodded. "Have fun, chum." He handed Carey a sheet on which he'd jotted a description of the colonel and his wife. Carey stuffed it into a pocket of his raincoat and left, muttering sleepily.

And that was where matters stood as of a Wednesday. Baumann sweated out Thursday with office details, arriving early and leaving late. Col. Harvey called incessantly until Baumann snapped at him. Then the calls stopped.

At home, Baumann met long silences. The houses was topsy-turvy, the result of one of Carol's furious cleaning sessions. He knew what that meant. Mike shook off his fever and cold as Dr. Simmons had predicted, but did not regain his normal good spirits. Together, wife and son met Baumann with a gloomy, disunited front that forced him into a cage of lonely misery.

The most positive development in that 36 hours was the final drying up of the skies. At 10 Friday morning, the sun cut through thin clouds to begin the steaming out process. Swollen gutters spewed their last virulent traffic into the river and for most Sheridians life took on freshness.

Even Colonel Harvey was cheered, apparently, because his calls — started again at eight, ceased an hour after the rain did.

But the clouds didn't break for Baumann until mid-afternoon, when Pete Carey checked in by phone.

"I'm in Plainville," Pete said, "at the supermarket across the street from the Tropicana Bar. Your pal Harvey's over there with a stacked redhead. What now?"

"He's not onto you?"

"Nah. Traffic between Sheridan and Plainville was light, so I had the patrol plane keep him in sight for me. I picked him up again here in the noon rush."

"Who's the woman?"

"I don't know yet, but I got ahold of Chief Silverman here and he's putting a man on her, you should pardon the expression. From the looks of her pad, though, I'd say she's loaded with loot. This job could get fascinating."

"It already is," Baumann said dryly. "Stay with Harvey, and give me the word on the girl friend."

"Roger."

Baumann hung up, jumped into his car, and sped out to Warren Harvey's ancient house. He parked in the driveway between two dripping peach trees. He walked around the house, the soaked grass wetting his

shoes and cuffs. He stood in back for a minute or two, bothered slightly by something about the place, an incongruity he couldn't quite pin down. The he climbed the steps to the kitchen door.

The lock was of simple, conventional variety. Baumann required ten seconds to open it.

Inside, the house was typical Sheridan Ridge. Enormous kitchen, old rooms with high ceilings, dark, polished woodwork, ancient gas jets converted to wall lamps, solid oak floors, a smell of permanence.

Yet, Baumann noticed, there was about the rooms a certain shabbiness, almost an air of decay.

He poked around until he found something of interest. In an upstairs bedroom dresser was a collection of overdue bills. They were stacked in order of urgency, the oldest on top. Baumann counted 27, including second and final notices. In plain sight on the same dresser was a woman's purse. In it were hairpins, a compact, a wallet containing Madeline's drivers license, cards, photographs of herself and the colonel; a hand pack of kleenex; a comb, two more past due bills — Baumann stopped counting.

Don't tell me, he thought, that a woman leaves the house for all night without her purse

In the closet were seven dresses, all of rather drab color and texture.

Baumann strode across the hallway, yanked open a closet door, and stared at four Air Force uniforms, half a dozen smart single-breasted suits, three sport coats, an assortment of sweaters and slacks. In a smaller room adjoining, there were expensive motion picture equipment, two German cameras, an impressive array of enlarged glossies of Colonel Harvey in uniform, Col. Harvey waving from a jet cockpit, Col. Harvey smiling from the center of a group of flyers.

Baumann walked slowly downstairs. A new picture of the illustrious flier was forming in his mind. He pulled the back door open, then halted abruptly, his thinking broken.

Mike was standing on the bottom step.

The boy gazed up at his father. "I saw the car. I thought maybe you and Col.—"

"Come in son," Baumann said. He held the door as Mike moved past him. The boy's paper bag was slung over his thin shoulders. He stopped in the center of the kitchen.

"I can't stay. I've got to get on with my route."

"Sit down, Mike."

The boy slipped the canvas sling off over his head and sat down on the very edge of a

straight chair. His face seemed white, his young eyes too large.

"Son," Baumann said uneasily, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes, sir."

Baumann's mouth tightened. "Everyone has heroes, Mike. Mine was Babe Ruth. It took me years to realize that, great as the Babe was, he was an imperfect man, like all of us. The fact he was my hero didn't mean he never did wrong. But I was lucky. Lots of kids make heroes out of men like John Dillinger or Pretty Boy Floyd. It's easy to do. Those fellows were colorful. But a colorful man isn't necessarily a good man, Mike, and in the long run the good ones win. The good ones are willing to pay for what they get in life."

Baumann paused. He felt miserable. He wasn't saying what he had to say. Not at all.

Mike was watching him, his face pinched and serious. In that moment, Baumann suddenly knew he could not speak another word. The boy was too young. As a father, Baumann had already asked too much of the lad. He'd called for adult reactions to childhood problems.

And the worship of a hero was a childhood problem, one that had nothing to do with Intelligence or Responsibility.

Mike said, "Is that all, sir?"

"That's all. Go throw your papers."

Mike lifted the bag and moved to the door. His hand reaching, for the know, hesitated, then fell. "Sir, there's something I ought'ta tell you about, as long as we're talking."

Baumann's heart jumped. "Yes, Mike?"

"It's about—" Mike's mouth twitched —"well, the other morning, when I was throwing my papers in the rain, I saw something."

"Wait." Baumann raised a hand. "It's going to hurt to tell me, isn't it?"

Mike's mouth pinched at the corners. He nodded silently.

Baumann went to the boy, massaged the thin shoulders in his big hands. "Then don't tell me. Not now."

Mike's eyes came up. "How about — responsibility?"

"Just for this one time, we'll let it go. Now you take off."

A look of immense relief flooded Mike's face. He grinned. "See you at supper — Dad."

Hoisting his bag, he pulled the door open and jumped down the back steps.

For a space of ten seconds Baumann glowed under a kind of wretched delight and satisfaction. The boy had been about to depose his hero, even while still believing in him — or wanting to believe.

And for stopping him, Bau-

mann had received an accolade — his son had called him Dad, for the first time in years.

Then the realization swept through him that this small victory was counterfeit. Baumann felt the taste of copper in his mouth. Why did the boy have to be mixed up in this? *Why?*

He walked to the front of the house and watched as Mike tripped across the lawn. At the flooded street corner, the boy slowed suddenly, and for a moment gazed at the still surface of the muddy water. Then he glanced back at the house once and hurried on.

And another piece of the puzzle fell in place in Baumann's mind. He thought, every corner in Sheridan Ridge is cleared of water — except this one.

He strode back to the kitchen, picked up the phone, and dialed the Sheridan Ridge station. A bored male voice spoke.

"Ridge station, Jones speaking."

"This is Lieutenant Baumann, Jones. Any word on Mrs. Harvey?"

"Nothing, sir! No sir!" Jones' voice came alert.

"Sergeant, I'm at the Harvey home, 1104 East 9th. The number is Winston 7-4892. Transfer all my calls here."

"Yes, sir."

"And stay alive, mister."

"Yes, sir!"

Baumann went outside and walked west, past the deserted corner house and the intersection, to the center of the 1000 block of Ninth Street. At the curve of a gutter, at a private driveway, was a manhole. Prying the lid up, Baumann kneeled and peered inside. He could see little, but the slight gurgle of running water told him the sewer was flowing normally.

He got to his feet, replaced the manhole cover, and returned to the flooded intersection. For a long moment, he studied the notionless scum of brown water, a dark frown lining his face.

Twenty seconds later, he was back inside phoning Jack Edwards, the Sheridan Ridge city engineer. Edwards was jocularly annoyed at the interruption of a profitable hand of poker, but agreed to earn his salary by driving out to join Baumann.

"Bring along a map of the sewer system," Baumann said.

"Of the river section? Don't got one, Arch."

Baumann swore.

"Don't hang me for it," Edwards pleaded. "Blame that pennywise city council that wouldn't lay out a few extra bucks for a fire-proof file back in '52."

"Can you figure the damn sewers out?"

" I can try."

"Well, make it a good try. I

think we've got a body jammed up in one of them."

Jack Edwards, accompanied by two palpitating assistants, an equipment truck, and tools, arrived in record time. He parked across the street, jumped out, and approached Baumann, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"A stiff, huh? Who you think it is, Arch?"

Baumann did not smile. "Maybe nobody. That's what I want you to find out. The flow stops somewhere in this block. It's normal in the next block west. Only I don't see how it *can* be, because—" He jabbed a finger at the point where the corner sewer outlet should be—"this branch of the system must empty down the hill into the river."

Edwards nodded. "There's a side branch then. These gutters been here since the year zero. The early Christians probably hid from the lions in them."

"Can you unplug this one?"

Edwards scowled. "We can unplug it, but—you're right in wondering whether you'll find anything. Most of these old channels are just about big enough to squeeze an adult body into if you jammed it, real hard. I can't see one just floating in there easy like."

"Take a chance," Baumann said.

While the sewer was being investigated, Baumann returned to the house and commandeered the stack of past-due bills and Madeline Harvey's purse. He was just starting to list certain expense factors in the house when the phone rang. It was Pete Carey.

"I'm at the south edge of Plainville, Arch. Our boy is out on the highway, heading home. The patrol plane has him."

"Good work, Pete. What about the woman?"

"Her name is Rita Matthews. She's just shed a husband, a rich Oklahoma oil man. Married to him for seven months. Not a bad deal, considering she gets a grand a month alimony plus the little 20-room shack I told you about before.

"All right," Baumann said. "Now give Harvey a lot of room on the highway. Pick him up when he hits Sheridan Ridge again. He should make the drive in 40 minutes. When he turns off the highway, give me a buzz on the air. I've got a radio car. Use Channel Three."

"Got it. Any more on this situation, Arch?"

"I think it's possible this gentleman tried to give his wife a quiet ocean voyage—starting in front of his house, in the sewer."

Pete Carey whistled. "Nice people we deal with," he noted cynically. "Thank goodness the pay is fabulous."

Outside, the work was progressing.

"We dragged a Wyeget through there," Jack Edwards said excitedly. "Found the branch. The flow from west is shunted to the river through the branch. Which means one thing: this plugged section is plugged in two spots, one on each side of the outlet. Otherwise, this pond would have drained."

"What's next?" Baumann asked. His voice sounded harsh with fatigue and impatience.

"Clean the bastard out." Edwards yelled at an assistant on the truck. "Hurry with those hooks, Riddle!"

The hooks were long, flexible rods with prehensile devices which could be thrust into the sewer and operated from the other end. Nervously, Baumann watched as the men used them, withdrawing them time after time and stripping them of soaked paper, mud, straw, bits of wood and wire, a tennis shoe, a tangle of clothesline rope. The stench was sickening.

After half an hour of work, Riddle, operating the longest hook, suddenly yelled. A deep gurgling rose from the water. Slowly at first, then faster, it began to swirl down the outlet. In a remarkably short time the outlet was uncovered.

"It's a combination outlet and manhole," Jack Edwards said. "We'll be able to work inside and clean the other side fast."

Baumann walked to the car and sat down. He stared at the radio and prayed Pete wouldn't call. Now, he needed only time. But it burped within three minutes. Cursing the fact, Baumann picked up the handset, flicked the butterfly switch, and acknowledged.

"Our flyboy just turned into the north side," Pete Carey's voice said. "He's driving east on 20th Street."

"He's headed this way then."

"Looks like it."

"Stay with him, Pete. Follow him right in. Keep awake."

"You know me. Good luck, Arch."

Baumann cut the set and sat still for a moment. What to do now? With no *corpus delicti* he could not conceivably support a case against Harvey. Yet, with the instinct of his years of experience, Baumann knew the man had killed his wife. There was a motive: Need for money. The opportunity: Anytime, but most likely that pitch dark, rain-swept morning when Mike had seen him. The weapon: His bare hands? Maybe, maybe not.

At any rate, the assembled and fitted pieces told Baumann Mike must have caught his hero in some act which he suspected was wrong. Or — could Mike's ten-year-old brain have been adding

two and two and coming up with five?

Angrily, Baumann slid out of the patrol car. Not Mike. Not that sensible kid. Baumann stalked toward the house, toward the straight-ranked peach trees. He halted sharply at the sight of a slight figure in a dusty-pink coat scrambling from a car across the street. Cornelia Ray hurried toward him.

"Mr. Bordman—" She wore a bright scarf. Pink plastic pin-curlers jutted from the edge of her hair.

"You shouldn't be here, Miss Ray."

One white hand fluttered. "I just had to come by and see if there was any news about Madeline."

"We haven't found her."

"Oh." She twisted her fingers together, and glanced uneasily at the sewer crew. "What are those men doing?"

"They're just unplugging after this rain. Miss Ray, unless you have definite business at the Harveys', you'd better go."

"Warren is in trouble, Mr. Bigman. I'm his — *their* friend. That's definite enough for me."

"You won't be able to talk to him yet."

"He isn't—"

"*Arch!*"

Baumann turned. The picture that printed itself on his mind was of Jack Edwards and his assistants standing motionless, staring at something the hook had dredged up. His heart pounding suddenly, Baumann strode to them. He looked down, believing and yet not believing. It was a mass of straw and other debris — and a suety white, water-wrinkled arm and hand, a forarm and a muddy, deformed hand with twisted fingers that seemed to be grasping at something.

"Cover that," he rasped, but it was too late.

Agonized sound raked from Cornelia Ray's throat. "Oh, no! Oh, my God in heaven, no—"

He turned in time to catch her as she sank against him. Her eyes squeezed shut and her thin fingers dug into his arm.

"Why did he do it? Oh, why, why?"

"Miss Ray, you've got to go home."

"I can't. He can't do this — to me — he can't—"

Baumann's mind spun. He started to ask what she meant, and then abruptly understanding came and he didn't need to.

Supporting her, he walked her to her car. The bright scarf slipped down from her hair. The pink curlers looked ludicrously young. In the sunlight, Baumann could see the shiny whiteness of the woman's scalp, and the thick strands of gray laced through the hair

"He's not worth it," Baumann said harshly. "Get that through your pretty head, Cornelia Ray. Warren Harvey is a heel and probably a killer. He isn't worth a dime, let alone your love! Do you hear me?"

She broke from his grasp and leaned against her car. Fishing in a pocket of the pink coat, she brought out a handkerchief and blew her nose loudly. When she looked up at Baumann, her eyes were brimming, her mouth working. In abrupt resolution, she yanked the car door open, climbed in, and started the motor. She drove off without another word, without a single glance back.

The death of a woman, and the death of a fruitless love, Baumann thought. *One fear is like another . . .*

Turning, he strode back to Edwards and the grisly exhibit. "What have you got to wrap that in?"

"A gunny sack okay?"

"Anything to keep it from messing up Colonel Harvey's dining room rug."

Jack Edwards and the two assistants stared in horror. Baumann glared at them. "Get that damned truck out of here. Then bring Exhibit A inside the Colonel's house. And hurry, for Christ's sake! He's due back any second!"

Colonel Harvey's automobile was, of course, a late model convertible. It was black, freshly washed and waxed. It had white sidewalls and fancy outside mirrors and a limber buggywhip antenna that quivered as the car jerked to a stop in the driveway. From inside the front room, Baumann watched as the colonel climbed out, stretched, and started around the driveway to the back. For a moment, the colonel was beyond Baumann's vision. Then he reappeared, walking toward the line of peach trees paralleling the street. He walked slowly, and then stopped and stood very still for the space of half a minute.

He was surveying the street corner.

That's right. Baumann breathed. *She's gone, killer.*

The colonel turned and came toward the house again, a small frown lining his brow. He walked within 10 feet of Baumann, and after a short interval Baumann heard a key scratch in the back door lock.

He placed himself in position. Kitchen, dining room, and living room doors stood aligned. Between dining and living rooms there was no door; they were separated by a heavy split drape. Baumann stood behind this drape. In his right hand he gripped his Police Special .38. Cold fear oozed onto his forehead. The colonel pushed the kitchen

door open, stepped inside, closed the door. He turned and started straight toward Baumann.

When he saw the burlap sack in the center of the dining room he stopped as if hit by a bullet. His jaw fell. His eyes stared, then popped wide. He lifted one shaking hand and passed it over his face, blinking over the fingers at the bag and what lay exposed upon it.

Then he ran into the dining room and knelt beside the bag, and a small, dry sound hissed from his lips.

Baumann realized later that he must have moved or swallowed or breathed too loud. Harvey's head herked up. He stared, wild-eyed, at the drape.

Baumann stepped into the room. "Do you miss her, Colonel?"

Harvey's eyes changed in some way. He raised the shaking hands and held them in front of his mouth. Slowly, he doubled up the knuckles of his left hand and began to gnaw on them.

Baumann said, "Why did you do it, Harvey?"

Suddenly, with fierce speed, the man came to his feet. He brushed past Baumann, twisted, and threw himself against the wall. Nails clawing, his body shaking, he slid down the wall to his knees. A horrible, animal agony came from his throat.

Baumann's mouth went sand-dry. "Why did you do it?" he repeated. "Why, Harvey?"

The sounds that came through the great, gagging sobs turned to the agonized confession of a small boy.

"Because she . . . wouldn't . . . let me . . . go . . . "

The sobs broke to wildness, to despair.

"Jesus!" a voice said at Baumann's shoulder. "Jesus Christ!"

It was Pete Carey. His broad mouth curled in distaste. Baumann glanced at him, then pulled out a cigarette and lit it with a flame that danced before his eyes.

They stood together, waiting, listening to the wild, racking sobs. Finally, Carey walked to the phone. Baumann barely heard him ask for Headquarters. His mind was too full of the sounds of a hero dying . . .

The confession was typed in quintuplicate by nine that night. Baumann read a copy in the office of the State City Chief of Police. Madeline Courtney, once the heiress daughter of a wealthy real estate broker, had married Warren Harvey after a two-week courtship during the second world war. The marriage was stormy. When the money was gone, and when Harvey had left the Air Force at the pointed suggestion of a series of proficiency review boards, she

had insisted they return to Sheridan Ridge, her childhood home. She wanted to nurse the peach trees planted by her mother. She wanted a simple life. But Harvey needed money and wanted freedom. Madeline denied him divorce. He had killed her with a single hammer blow, then carved her up with surgical tools which now lay 300 yards from his door, on the river bottom.

Before Baumann left State City, he was offered a new job—as head of detectives in State City proper. He declined after a full 10 seconds deliberation, saying it would take too much time from his wife and boy.

He also received a call from Jack Edwards. "The damnest thing, Arch: That sewer residue tangled up in the hand — you got any idea what most of it was?"

"I'll try a guess," Baumann said. "Peach tree roots."

"You're right! Isn't that a hairy old coincidence for you?"

"I'm not sure," Baumann said thoughtfully. "Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't."

He hung up and went outside and stood looking up at the sky. It was cloudless now, a clear, deep blue. The rain was over. The case was closed. And yet it was not quite finished for him. He still had to tell Mike, and that would be the hardest part of all. His hope was that the boy would understand. Everything.

He strode down the steps toward his car, the sun warm on his face.

Americans Banned From Macao's Casinos

American tourists have recently been banned from one of the biggest tourist attractions in the Far East—the casinos at Macao, in Southern China—following the discovery by U.S. Treasury officials that the casinos, known as the Monte Carlo of the East, are controlled by a syndicate whose sole job it has been to get dollars into Red China.

It has been definitely established that funds from the casino syndicate are going to Communist China. No effort is obviously being (or can be) made to stop Americans from going to Macao, but, a U.S. Consulate spokesman in Hong Kong is quoted as pointing out, "anyone who enters the casinos will be breaking the law and they will be trading with the enemy."

Macao, like Hong Kong, is completely dependent on China's cooperation for water and food, so it is considered unlikely that the local authorities will do anything to antagonize the syndicate. It is believed Chinese Communist agents have controlled the casinos for years and that millions of dollars have already been routed in this fashion to Peking.

The saint in modern art

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

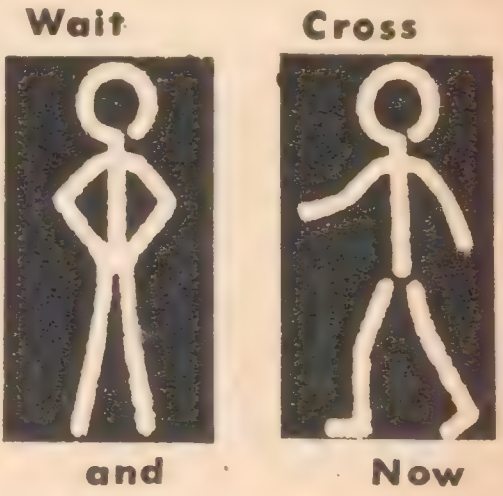
In midsummer 1963, my agents in London received an inquiry from the British Ministry of Transport, who were proposing to set up some experimental road crossings where pedestrians could press a button to operate lights that would stop the traffic, while from their side they would be obliged under pain of a substantial fine to watch a "match-stick" figure of a little man who would be symbolically stationary until it was safe for them to cross, when he would become animated as if walking, like a movie cartoon.

The Ministry felt that these crossings would inevitably become popularly known as "Saint Crossings", and they therefore wanted to find out if I would have any objection to this use of a device so closely resembling my trade-mark.

Properly awed by the fact that this was the first time that any Government ever asked my permission to do anything, I hastened to assure them that I would not only have no objection, but would feel ineffably complimented.

With their trepidation thus allayed, the Ministry set the first three of these experiments in motion last September 30. We bring you here a reproduction of what they look like.

You will notice that the figure



only lacks a halo. I am wondering whether this is to be included as a supplementary feature which lights up in commendation whenever the crossing law is properly obeyed, or whether it is reserved in the hereafter for any too-trustful pedestrian for whom the traffic did not stop.

But our little insigne does seem to have achieved a certain pinnacle of immortality. Who ever heard of a Mona Lisa crossing?

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

There might have been a dozen reasons why Loudon Wingate, retired professor of history at Dyckman University and now librarian in Van Brunt, had closed his library up. "He might, conceivably, merely have felt like it. More probably, he had gone somewhere in his ancient Packard, itself eligible for retirement, to collect a donation. The library at Van Brunt Center lived to a considerable degree on donations. People cleaned out attics, found crumbling books; told one another that the library would be glad to have them. Some merely brought them in and piled them dustily in the reading room. The more considerate asked the librarian to come and have a look, preliminary to bonfire. That could be where Professor Wingate was. He was having a look somewhere."

Moments later Enid Vance knew there was still another reason.

She had pushed the door open and walked into the little room in the rambling old house everybody knew as Far Top. Homer Lenox, the last of the Hudson

Mr. Santesson continues his column on recent novels and other books in which readers of the SMM may be interested. The writer, editor of this magazine since 1956, edited the Unicorn Mystery Book Club during 1945-52.

Valley Lenoxes, "lay face down on the softly polished, wide-boarded floor", and Professor Wingate "sat across the little room, his back to the wall. He seem to look at her with open eyes, but there was a hole between his eyes." Yes, they were both dead.

Richard and Frances Lockridge's THE DISTANT CLUE (Lippincott, $3.50), is an unusually attractive portrait of life in this Putman County community that, not for the first time in its history, finds murder disturbing the even tenor—apparent even tenor, rather—of its ways. This is the community in which M.L. Heimrich, Captain, New York State Police, lives; this is the community into which he has married. As a result, the necessary probing into the background of the people who might, any one of them, have killed the old men, is both eased and complicated; there is always the possibility that one of these people, whose parents had known Susan Heimrich's parents, could have committed the murder.

Thoroughly recommended.

Erle Stanley Gardner's newest Perry Mason novel, THE CASE OF THE AMOROUS AUNT (Morrow, $3.50) tells the story of what happens to Lorraine Elmore who has been certain that, at long last, she has found someone who understands her. And she may have been right . .

A number of factors complicate the romance however—not the least of whom is murder — and Perry Mason faces unusual problems in his efforts to untangle the affairs of the amorous aunt. Recommended.

Gardner, as he points out in his foreword, tries in these novels to interest the reader in the vital importance of legal medecine. "In cold-blooded crimes committed by an intellectual and scheming murderer who has greed or revenge as his goal, the medical examiner, following clues which would never be apparent to a less thoroughly trained individual, can establish the truth." With this in mind, this novel is dedicated by Gardner to his friend Dr. Manuel Merino Alcantara, Sub-Director of the Mexican Forensic Institute and Professor of Legal Medecine at the National University of Mexico Medical School, not only in recognition of the reality that legal medicine is international in scope, but also of the distinct achievements of the profession in Mexico.

Simon Harvester writes espionage stories with Asian settings. We are told by the publishers, no doubt with utmost sincerity, "that, with the possible exception of Eric Ambler, pro-

bably no one now writing can touch him in his chosen field." And Dorian Silk, who returns here in SILK ROAD (Walker, $3.50) is supposed to have been described by one critic as "the most original creation in espionage fiction since Richard Hannay."

I don't know. I don't know.

There is a papier mache feeling about the backgrounds, the "Asian settings", in these novels. I have previously commented on Mr. Harvester's most recent novel, TIGER IN THE NORTH, where this was even more evident. Here too, in the story of the trek of these agents across Afghanistan, there is something of this same feeling. I do not doubt that the author (whose earlier novels, under another name, were rather pleasant) does — or did — know "the wilds of High Asia" (as the jacket blurb puts it) but there is a curiously *dated* quality to this knowledge. There is no denying that this *is high* adventure in the Buchan tradition but these are far from "grimly realistic" stories, "electric with tension" (to again quote the jacket blurb). These are colorful enough adventure novels, "thrillers" in the old tradition, the protagonists sometimes hard to believe in, and set against a background which only occasionally comes to life.

Carlton Keith's Jeff Green is one of the more interesting detectives in this field. An examiner of "Questioned Documents", a partner in a firm concerned solely with such matters, he is finding himself involved more and more sional interest to the homicide with matters normally of professquad. His later excursion into this field, in RICH UNCLE (Doubleday, $3.50), involves him in a number of rather strange situations and with some unusual persons.

John Le Carre's new George Smiley novel, A MURDER OF QUALITY (Walker, $3.50), is perhaps not as effective as was his award-winning CALL FOR THE DEAD. Smiley finds himself investigating an apparently senseless murder at Carne, an old but not particularly historic British public school, the Masters of which are a rather depressing lot. There is a peculiarly anachronistic quality to the snobbery of these people which will seem exaggerated in these days, but this by itself I have no quarrel with. This can be so. One knows it. And the motive for the murder, as finally worked out by Smiley, makes sense when considered against this particular background. But somehow George Smiley does seem out of his element.

homicide—hot off the griddle

by Stewart Sterling

THE Chief Fire Marshal regarded the restaurant menu with a sudden and unaccountable distaste. This muggy weather must have put him off his feed. He didn't seem to have any appetite now. His taste for food was all gone.

Yet five minutes ago when he came into the *Cafe Vesuvius* he'd been hungry enough in spite of the August heat. Mater of fact he'd been looking forward to Luigi's *minestrone* and some of that fabulous *scallopini* the Marshal remembered so well. For once in his life he'd counted on combining business with pleasure.

But now that he was here with a bowl of the steaming macaroni-and-vegetable soup on the red-checkered tablecloth before him, the Fire Marshal's appetite was gone. Queer. As yet he hadn't even mentioned his unpleasant business to Luigi. But already the agreeable anticipation of talking over old times with the restaurant proprietor and his wife had vanished. In its place was this disturbing premonition of trouble brewing.

Somewhat more than twelve years ago, the author told how he had already then lived and worked for varying periods in seventeen states (and in Hollywood) and traveled in twenty others. A onetime trade magazine editor, Mr. Sterling is the author of numerous novels including several (WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, NIGHTMARE AT NOON, etc.) about Fire Marshal Ben Pedley.

He stared across the dining-room at the vivid blue of the Bay of Naples splashed on the stuccoed wall — the smoking pyramid of the great volcano in the background. Never before in all the years Marshal Pedley had been coming to the *Vesuvius* had the painting seemed significant. Now it was appropriate enough, though. The restaurant help were all acting as if they expected that smouldering mountain to actually explode into eruption any minute.

They were certainly keyed up. Jan, the thin, undersized bus boy who'd cleared off Pedley's table had been so jittery he'd spilled the powdered cheese from the parmesan bowl with his trembling fingers and muttered an unsteady apology.

On Luigi's own broad, olive face was a tight, nervous smile quite different from his customary grinning geniality. Even his wife, the fat Momma with the black-enameled hair—over there behind the cash register counter—grimly mopped perspiration from her double chin, plucked irritably at the damp stickiness of her dress. She offered none of her usual amiable greetings to the late dinner patrons.

Why did the entire staff give the impression of waiting for something unpleasant to happen? It couldn't be because of the official ultimatum in Ben Pedley's pocket. None of them had seen that, yet. Anyhow, a warning from the Fire Department, no matter how serious, wasn't likely to upset a bus boy.

Or a waitress. That slim, blonde waitress who was a newcomer to the cafe as far as Pedley recalled, seemed to be more agitated than any of the others. Maybe she was the storm-center of this curiously strained atmosphere. She was good looking enough with that trimly matured figure and the long, satiny bob of yellow hair framing her emotional face. She looked capable of creating a disturbance around any impressionable males.

Luigi hadn't been roaring reprimands at her the way he generally did at everyone who worked for him, either. Maybe Momma Sonetta was suspicious of that. Perhaps she had reason to be. Perhaps Momma was not so dumb.

That might account for the distracted manner in which the blonde had twice wrongly written down Pedley's order for the veal *scallopini* and a bottle of *nebiola,* finally asked him what he wanted to drink. But it wouldn't explain why she'd watched the Marshal with fear so clearly stamped in her slightly slanting mint-green eyes.

Why was she afraid of him? Because Luigi had welcomed

him with the old familiar title? "*Buon dì*, inspector," Luigi had said. Well, that was the rank Pedley'd held in the Department when he first dropped in at Luigi's long ago. The Italian had never called him anything else through all the years Pedley had come to the *Vesuvius* for parties or celebration dinners or a quiet corner for two.

Perhaps the waitress had mistaken him for a police inspector. He could find out about that, easily enough. He took out the Final Warning, spread it flat on the tablecloth. The short, squat proprietor was just coming out of the kitchen.

Pedley called: "Looey, come here for a minute."

Luigi hurried over. His eyes flashed questioningly to the blonde, who was setting up a table—then to Momma behind her cigar counter. He was plainly on edge.

"I don't like to give this to you Looey." The Marshal tapped the document. "I've always thought you were a pretty good guy."

Luigi showed his teeth in an apprehensive grin. "Whatsa mat'? I'm still justa like always. Sure."

"You're getting careless, Looey. You're in a spot." Pedley crackled the paper.

"More pape's?" The proprietor flexed the muscles of his thick, bull-like neck. "I got so many dam'e pape's now for fill out, for make swear to. Momma she's almos' craze with fill out the rash' board pape's."

"This's no ration stuff. This is somebody who's fed up with you."

Luigi squinted at it:

FIRE DEPARTMENT, CITY OF NEW YORK
Bureau of Combustibles

Mr. . . . Luigi Sonetta. . .

You . . . *were* . . . directed by the Fire Commissioner on . . . *June* 10, 1943 . . . to . . . *widen exit and equip with double doors opening outward* within . . . 30 *days* : : : the premises at No. . . . 1427 *Carmine Street* (leased) by you, said premises being considered dangerous to life and property and in its present condition a violation of law.

Having failed to cause the ordered . . . *widening and equipping* . . . to be done within the . . . 30 *days* . . . period, I am required by law to notify you that the said premises are hereby ordered to be . . . *vacated* : : :

John L. Branner
Deputy Fire Commissioner.

"Whatsa va-cate?" The Italian scowled. "Means-a get out, no?"

"Yair. Close up shop."

"Holy—" Luigi was stunned. "How long I got, hah? Two, t'ree day?"

Pedley took a padlock out of his pocket, laid it on the table. "I'm supposed to put this on your door when I go out."

The whites of Luigi's eyes showed.

The Marshal stuck the padlock back in his pocket. "I saw the notice the Department was going to shut you up, Looey. I thought there might be a way of straightening it out. So I brought the order over, myself."

"*Dio'!*" Luigi pulled out a chair, sat down weakly. "What I got to do?"

"Fix the exits." Pedley felt the eyes of Momma Sonetta watching him, noticed that the blonde waitress hovered within earshot. "The Fire Department isn't trying to put taxpayers out of business. But we can't let you run a hazard that might kill a lot of people. If a fire should get going in here, with all your tables full, somebody would get roasted alive."

"It gonna cos' me t'ree, four hunnerd bucks to fix that dam' door."

"So what? With the prices you're charging here, you ought to be making plenty of the old lettuce."

"Thatsa what you think. I gotta pay big price for whats I buy. An' I can't giva my customer all he wantsa for eat, nohow. Every day I gotta fight with the rash' board for get more beef, more veal, more pork. I tella you, I'm go broke so fas' . . ." He was speaking loud enough for Momma to hear what he was saying.

Maybe he wanted to make sure his wife did hear, Pedley decided. Perhaps there'd been some unusual drain on the restaurant receipts that Luigi felt required explanation. If he'd been spending money on a blonde, for instance . . .

That wasn't any of the Marshal's business. But he couldn't let the cafe stay open with the exits this way. An old-law, reconstructed basement of this sort gave a fireman the shivers, anyway. If a flash blaze should start when the place was packed with dinners, there'd be ugly headlines in the papers the next morning.

"You get an estimate on what it would cost to widen those sills, Looey?"

"Sure." The Italian smeared a hand over his face. "T'ree hunnerd twenny buck. Wit'out the doors."

"Okay. Write out a check, mail the order for the work. Right now." He put the padlock on the table again. "Or else."

Luigi held out his hands, palms upward. "If I got to, I got to. You don' close me up, then, hah?"

"No. But don't kid yourself. I'll be around in the morning to

see the work's started. And there's one more thing." Pedley stood up. "Down at the Bureau they wanted to slap a hundred dollar fine on you, anyway—"

"I'm ruin, already! For why?"

"—for not keeping that aisle clear in your kitchen. You know the regulations, Looey."

"Sure," Luigi admitted. "But I got so many troub'. Is tough to look after ever' dam thing."

"That's one thing you want to put right up at the head of the list." Pedley saw the blonde start swiftly for the kitchen, disappear through the swinging service door. "Maybe your help is willing to take chances on getting out, if there's a fire. But the boys from the hose companies can't monkey around stumbling over potato barrels and sacks of beans when they want to get in. I'll take a look out there right now. Bet you I find—"

"I fix. I fix." Luigi put his hands on the Marshal's shoulders. "You ain't gotta worry."

A muffled cry came from behind that swinging door. It was just a startled shout. Nobody could have understood it to mean "Fire!" It was a crazy scream.

But Pedley understood the tiny strip of gray, wooly smoke that puffed out suddenly along the top of the service door. He swung around, moved quickly but casually, so as not to start any panic among the dozen diners.

He needn't have been so careful. When he was halfway across the floor to the phone booth beside Momma's cigar counter, every living soul in the place let out a wild yell of terror.

Pedley wheeled. A bare-armed man burst out of the kitchen. The long apron which was tied around his waist was a livid sheet of flame. Little spurts of flame blossomed from his undershirt. A smoking halo circled his head as he ran crazily against tables, knocked over chairs, bumped into panic-stricken diners.

In five seconds the cafe was a screeching bedlam of toppling tables, burning cloth, struggling men and women.

Pedley leaped toward the barearmed man. He snatched a ketchup bottle from a table, swung it. It caught the human rocket from the side, smashed against his head, dropped him like a steer under the mallet.

Before the man hit the floor, the Marshal was tearing off the blazing apron, stamping it underfoot. He slapped at the heavy glass carafe on the nearest table, knocked it over. The water spilled over the tablecloth. Pedley grabbed at the corner of the cloth yanked it from under ashtrays, sauce bottle, vinegar

cruets. He flung the wet fabric over the man's head and body, dropped to one knee beside him.

"Take it easy," he called sharply to the others. "There's no danger. Unless you hurt yourselves fighting to get out."

That slowed some of those who were battling toward the exit. But the Marshal knew he'd only slowed them for a second. The stampede might start again in an instant.

Two men at one table were beating at widening, luminous circles on a woman's dress. Another woman was trying to get up off the floor after tipping over backward in a tangle of tan stockings and pink silk. The tablecloth beside her was fringed with flame.

Pedley lowered his tone to reassure them. "Dial your operator," he called calmly to Momma. "Ask for Fire Department, Emergency." While she dialed, he dampened the unconscious man's hair, put out the blazing grease on his undershirt, tore at his belt. The dishwasher's trousers were still aglow in a dozen places. "Give 'em the name of the cafe, Momma. Tell 'em your address. Say it's just a grease fire in the kitchen."

Just a grease fire! Only about the most dangerous kind of a blaze you can run up against. But the boys in the dispatchers office would understand. And it might help to calm this excited crowd at the narrow door.

"Exits'll take care of a hundred, folks." It was a break there *weren't* a hundred in here. "Plenty of time. Make sure you've got your coats and purses." There *wasn't* plenty of time. But they could all get out if they went slowly enough. If he could get them thinking about their personal property, they'd be less likely to injure somebody in a mad rush.

"Looey!" Pedley called. The proprietor was splashing wine over the smoking tablecloth. He came running toward the Marshal.

"Help me rip off his pants. Who is he?"

"He'sa Ed. My pearl dive'. My dishwash! He's burn terrible!"

"Yair. Grease. Bad stuff." They got what was left of Ed's pants off. "Can you lug him out to the street?"

"Sure." Luigi stooped, hoisted the limp and blistered figure to his shoulder.

"Tell your wife to phone Saint Vincent's for a rush ambulance. Say it's third degree burns." The restaurant patrons were nearly all out now. The woman whose dress had been glowing was hysterical but she didn't seem to be burned much. "Who else's out there in the kitchen, Looey?"

Luigi pivoted around with the dead weight on his shoulders.

"Lili! *Madre!!* She'sa be burn up!" He made a movement as if to fling Ed to the floor.

Pedley spun him around, shoved him back toward the street door. "You carry him out. I'll get her out." He didn't say whether he'd get her out alive. But he could do as much as Luigi could, if it wasn't too late.

"Nick!" cried the proprietor from the door. "My cook, Nick. He'sa back in the kitch', too." He didn't seem quite so shocked at the cook's being in danger.

The swinging door to the kitchen came halfway open as Pedley started for it. A black, oily billow gushed out. There was no flame at its core but Pedley could feel the blast of heat behind it from twenty feet away. There was plenty of fire where that smoke came from. The door banged shut again.

Pedley got to it, yanked it open. The smoke surged out again, a nauseous, choking cloud. A burly figure backed into him, a thick-chested giant, naked to the waist. His white canvas pants were gray with soot. His white cap was flecked with sparks and sparks swirled against his arms, too, settled on them like fireflies. But he kept hold of the girl cradled in his arms. He staggered, lurched against the jamb.

The Marshal tried to take the waitress from him. She was struggling but she wasn't hurt. Her uniform wasn't even scorched.

"Lemme' lone," Nick panted. "I bring her this far. I take her rest of the way." There was a spot along the angle of his jaw where the skin glistened redly beneath the dark stubble of his beard. A splatter of blazing grease must have made that mark.

"All right. Get her out." Pedley kicked over a chair, stamped on one of the rungs, broke it off. "How'd it start?"

"That dumb cluck, Ed." The cook blinged smoke tears out of his eyes. "He bumps against the french-fry kettle. Splashes some fat over on the gas flame! Blooey!"

The Marshal jammed a broken end of the rung in beside one hinge of the swinging door. It would keep the door open.

"Nick!" It was the blonde screaming, but it wasn't a scream of pain. "Nick! Put me down!"

"You be okay, Lili. Lemme carry you." The cook held on to her.

"Nick!" she hammered on his bare chest with her fist. "Put me down. Go get Jan!"

"Jan?" the big man repeated. "Was Jan in there?"

Pedley wrenched the three-gallon extinguisher from its bracket just inside the kitchen

door. If the spindly little bus boy was still in that smoky inferno he must be unconscious or dead by now. There hadn't been any cries for help except that first startled yelp from the dishwasher.

"Jan took a tray in a minute or so before I went in." The blonde wrestled her legs from Nick's grip, got her feet on the floor. "You didn't see him come out, did you?"

"Didn't see him at all, Lili." Nick rubbed some of the singed hair off his chest. "The kid was sore at what Looey said. Maybe he jus' beat it out the back door, ran away."

Pedley didn't wait to hear any more. He plunged into the roiling smoke, crouching to avoid the fumes sweeping upward in the terrific heat. He held the nozzle of the extinguisher hose out in front of him. There was no sense squirting the stuff at smoke. You couldn't put out smoke with an extinguisher. He had to wait until he saw something to shoot at.

He saw it soon enough. A narrow line of incandescence ran along one wall of the kitchen where the blazing fat had followed the slope of the floor over to the crack between the linoleum and the wall.

He crept as close to that searing strip of fire as he could, upended the extinguisher. Nothing happened. Nothing came from the brass nozzle.

He shook the extinguisher. It was dead. Somebody must have tampered with it. The extinguishers would have been the first thing the hose company inspector would have tested after he'd turned in the final complaint against the *Vesuvius*. That had only been a few days ago. There wouldn't have been any occasion for the extinguisher to have been used since then. In any case, Luigi should have seen to it the thing was refilled right away or he'd forfeit his insurance.

That smoke-eater's seventh sense of the Marshal's had been right after all, in telegraphing the warning that something was wrong here. It added up, didn't it? The waiting for something to happen. Luigi's reluctance to make repairs which would represent money wasted if the cafe was to be intentionally burned down. And the empty extinguisher. . . .

He hung onto the metal cylinder, retreated a step before a licking tongue of flame that flicked up along the wall beside him. The extinguisher might turn out to be evidence.

The licking tongue of orange widened, leaped out at him in a sudden belching gust. He lunged blindly into a corner behind the huge refrigerator, slip-

ped on the greasy linoleum, plunged over backward down a flight of narrow stairs.

It only took a split second. He had just time enough to curse the person who'd leave a trap door open like that. He twisted around so he'd land on his side instead of his back. Then he bounced on the sharp edge of the wooden stairs, slid joltingly down, brought up against something that cushioned his fall to the floor. Something that was human flesh and bone.

He rolled away. It was the bus boy he had landed on. Jan was lying flat on his back. And the life hadn't been crushed out of him by Pedley's fall. There hadn't been any life in Jan for quite a few minutes. The dead boy's skin was already clammy to the touch. He must have died before the fire broke out.

Sirens wailed in the street above. Gongs clanged — the throbbing pulse of the pumpers made the stairs vibrate as the Marshal rolled off them. He landed in a litter of fruit boxes, empty oil cans, cardboard cartons full of rags. Stuff that would go up like excelsior at the first spark to drop down through that open trap door. He had to get out of here quick, no matter what the risk. The cellar might be a furnace in no time at all.

A sound of crashing glass and splintering of wood came from overhead. He looked up. The smoke on the floor above thinned to a gray veil as firemen smashed in the sash to make a vent. The increased draft whipped glowing woodwork into bright flame. An ember crackled off the edge of the trap door, tumbled down the stairs, broke into sputtering sparks.

Pedley went at them with his bare hands. It would take him half a minute to get up those steps. He didn't care to have a bonfire beneath his feet while he climbed.

He put the burning bits of wood out, hoisted the dead Jan over his right shoulder in the ladderman's grip. The extinguisher had fallen in an orange crate. He grabbed it up agin. It was a lot of weight to carry up those steep stairs with his lungs choking from the smoke and the heat stabbing at his eeyballs. But he made it.

There were two hosemen in the kitchen, fumbling in dense smoke at the fuse box, working on the gas cut off. They turned the Frankenstein faces of their gas masks toward him inquiringly.

"Okay," he shouted above the roar of the motors. "Go ahead. I'm okay." He stumbled out through the narrow back door into an alley. Already it was a tangle of hose-lines, ladders, a portable smoke exhauster,

Pedley's muscles ached from the heat, his lungs were tortured by red-hot needles — but he couldn't put the boy down here. He moved slowly along the alley, edged past a hose truck. Red-enameled apparatus filled Carmine Street. Helmeted men struggled with couplings, shouted hoarse commands.

Patrolmen leaned their bulk against ropes stretched across the street, bellowed angrily at youngsters trying to creep under the fire-line. An ambulance was drawn up by the curb between a pumper and the big hook-and-ladder. White coated figures squatted beside a stretcher on the curb.

Pedley laid Jan down, set the extinuisher beside him. Lili saw the body, screamed. Luigi let go of a policeman's arm, rushed over. "Holy cow!" he cried. "He'sa only knock out, hah?"

"For keeps," the Marshal said. "I found him down cellar." He stared down at the boy's dead sallow face. It seemed even thinner and bonier than when Jan was alive. The hair mat matted together in a little circle on top of the kid's skull. It looked as if ketchup had been spilled on it. But Pedley didn't need to look closer to know it wasn't ketchup.

Lili pointed at the wound, eyes wide with horror. "He was hurt! My God, he was *killed!*"

"Yair."

"Down cell?" Luigi was puzzled. "What was-a he do' down cell'? He'sa no biz down there. Nothing down there, only the *grappa.*"

"That's right." Nick came up. He was shiny with sweat. His dark hair was frizzled from the heat. "The kid shouldn't of been down cellar. How'd he get down there? No one was suppose to go down for the wine except th' boss."

Pedley stooped, patted a bulge in the bus boy's black cotton coat. There was something soft and rubbery in the pocket. The Marshal put his hand inside, pulled out a slab of pink meat, rolled up into a cylinder.

"Veal!" Nick exclaimed. "One them two-pound cutlets. Now for the love of —"

"Looey was right." Lili looked at the meat as if it was a bomb. "The kid was stealing out of the refrigerator."

"Musta been hide it down cell'." Luigi made no effort to pick up the meat. "If I know he was-a gonna burn up my place, I let him steal ev' dam steak an' chop we buy, firs'!"

Pedley went methodically through the rest of the boy's pockets. Ten feet away one of the short ladders went up over the sidewalk to the story above the restaurant. A two-inch stream lanced up with a hoarse roar over the Marshal's head. The

Battalion Chief would be sending in a second alarm, right about now. Or this thing would get out of control.

Momma Sonetta elbowed her way into the group. "Poor littla keed. I can't believe. *Piu d'un mezz' ora*—only half hour ago he was swear he no steal one littla speck hamburg, even. I can't believe." She was crying.

Lili said: "What more you want? There's the proof, right on him. No wonder he got scared when Looey told him the ration board was going to arrest somebody for black marketing!"

"I can't believe," wailed Momma. "Jan was good American kid. Patreeotic, he was. Always wear the Red Cross, buy the Victory Bon'." Tears streamed down her plump cheeks.

"Sure." Luigi wiped smoke-smudge off his face with the sleeve of his light summer suit. "Why wouldn' he buy the bon's with dough he'sa make from steal my meat! It ain't right to make speak bad for dead man! But this Jan he'sa ruin me. Set'sa fire to my cafe because I 'ccuse him of sneak out my pork an' beef an' veal."

"Don't be blaming . . . the kid!" The voice came from the stretcher. The dishwasher had propped himself up on one elbow. "Jan couldn't of started the fire." His head was covered with a brown buzz of burnt hair. His pale, square face was a grimace of pain. "There wasn't nobody near me when that french-fry kettle went up. I guess I must of bumped it, carrying them plates. There ain't enough room to get past there without hittin' the stove or the sink."

One of the internes put his hypodermic back into its case. "All right, fella. Just lie down, now." He took hold of one pair of stretcher handles.

Pedley touched the doctor's shoulder. "Put him in Detention. "I'll send a cop around. Understand?"

The doctor nodded. "How about that one?" He looked at Jan.

"No use. He's cold," Pedley said.

"Smoke?"

"Nn—uh." The Marshal put out a palm on Jan's chest, pressed down. No smoke came from the pinched nostrile or the blueish lips. "He got a smack on the skull. I'll hold him for the medical examiner."

The litter was lifted into the ambulance. A gong rang. The policeman cleared a path. The long white car slid away.

Momma sniffled. "What I tell you! Jan was *not* set the fire, Luigi."

The proprietor hunched up his shoulders, stuck out his lower lip. "He was thief, anyhow."

Pedley wiped the smoke out

of his red-trimmed eyes. "He might've stolen your meat rations. Maybe he had something to do with the blaze. I don't know about that. One thing I do know . . ."

They waited—Luigi—his wife—the blonde Lili and Nick the kcoo. Waited while the first flames glared in a second story window and another stream of water roared into that window from the short ladder. And then thunder of a coming storm cannoned heavily across the sky.

"The kid wasn't killed accidentally," the Marshal said.

Luigi spead his palms. "This trap door, he'sa plenty hev'."

"If it fell on him," Lili agreed, "it would have crushed his head."

"Like when you step on a berry basket." added Nick.

"Maybe," admitted Pedley. "But the trap door wasn't shut. It was opened up. I fell down through it. Anyhow, the boy wouldn't have been lying on his back at the foot of the stairs the way I found him. Either he'd have been lying on his belly, if the door caught him while he was going down. Or he'd have been face down on the stairs if the door'd dropped on him, coming up."

Nick rubbed the red spots where the sparks had burned his chest. "You mean somebody beat his brains out?"

'Yair." Pedley watched Momma Sonetta. She'd stopped crying. She was trying to get Luigi to look at her. The Italian could not seem to taks his eyes off the small still figure lying along the curb.

Pedley crossed the street to the insurance patrol truck, borrowed a tarpaulin. When he got back to the body, Nick was sitting on the curb with his feet in the gutter, his head in his hands. The cook coughed up a trickle of smoke.

"Dizzy?" The Marshal spread the canvas over Jan.

"Be all right in a minute." Nick spoke without looking up.

"Never can tell about fume poisoning. Keep off your feet for a while. Medical examiner'll be here right away. He'll give you a once-over." Pedley eyed Momma and the blonde. "You stick around, too. I'll be around back with Looey."

The proprietor came along without comment. He took out a pack of cigarettes, stuck one between his lips, reached mechanically in his pocket for a match. He squinted wretchedly at the sparks cascading up over the building, put the match back without using it.

Pedley yelled to a bluecoat: "Those three there—by the curb. Keep an eye on 'em."

"Yes *sir*, Marshal."

"Don't lose 'em. I may need 'em."

"They'll be here. The officer touched his visor.

Pedley shoved Luigi ahead of him, past the hose truck at the mouth of the alley. "Inspec'," Luigi splashed miserably through pools of water where glass shards crunched beneath his shoes. "Mab' you think I kill thesa Jan, hah?"

"Why would I think that? I've known you a long time, Looey. I never heard of you blowing your top."

"No. But I have fight with thisa kid. He'sa steal my stuff. Getsa me in wrong with the rash' board. So I say I'ma gonna fire him. Mab' you think I don't fire him—I smash out hisa brain?"

"*Somebody* put out his light." Pedley saw the smoke exhauster sucking a column of greasy brown fumes out of the kitchen. "But that's not down my alley. That's a cop job. Guy I'm after is the one who's responsible for your cafe burning down."

"Whatsa matt'! You hear Ed, no? He'sa say he's the one."

"I heard him. I don't know whether to believe him." The Marshal pushed Luigi over the threshold where swollen hose lines snaked into the kitchen. "Probably Ed *thought* he started the blaze. Maybe he did. That still leaves the guy who emptied the fire extinguisher in your kitchen so it couldn't put the blaze out. Chances are he'll be the one who slugged Jan."

The Italian gazed dismally at the charred walls, the warped nickle of the big coffee urn, the chipped enamel of the blackened refrigerator. He waved a pudgy hand.

"For why I do a theeng like this, hah? Burna down what all my life a builda up?"

"You're pretty well covered on this place, Looey."

"Cover' . . . ?"

"Insurance."

"Sure. Twenty year I pay the preem.' Never one-a cent I collect."

"You'll collect plenty now. If they pay off."

"What you mean, *if!*"

"They don't pay when a man torches his own place." Pedley listened for the tramp of booted feet overhead, heard only the rush of water. That wasn't so good. That meant the floor above wasn't safe or else the room above was still burning. Either way, those solid streams, thick as a man's wrist, would be pouring a couple of tons a minute on top of this metal ceiling. He couldn't hang around here long. "But if they do come across you'll be sitting pretty. You were losing money, weren't you?" It made the Marshal feel lousy to say it.

Luigi's fingers closed on Pedley's arm. "Lotsa peep' lose dough these-a day. Whata hell,

itsa war. I tell you truth, th' dough don't make no diff." There was agony in his eyes.

"Blonde trouble?"

"You saw? You smart, Inspec'!" Luigi let go of the Marshal, held out his hand with the fingers spread. "But you ain't got no idea, th' troub'."

"Your wife's wise." Pedley moved to the trap door, searched its underside. There was no mark of blood, no trace of hair. There would have been if the door had made that wound on Jan's head.

"She'sa tell me, Momma, if I don't fire Lili, she'sa gonna quit me."

Luigi grimaced. "You don't understan'. I'm craze for her. I'm nutsa when I don' see her. Why would I fix th' place like-a this, so I don' have no job for her to work, hah?"

"Why don't you leave your wife, then?" The Marshal felt a sudden stinging at the back of his neck, slapped at it. It was only water. Scalding water, dripping down through the joints in the white metal ceiling.

"Why don't I cut my own t'roat!" Luigi opened the oven doors. An odor of burnt meat came out with the dense, black smoke. "I can't live-a without Momma. Twenty-one year we been marry, *si*. I couldn' no more run this-a place without her than you can-a chew with no teet'. That's no good-a for nothin'."

"Maybe your wife doesn't feel so bad about the fire." Pedley stood in front of the small gas range where a sooty kettle held a drainer of wire netting. The french-fried kettle. "Maybe it would suit her if you collect your insurance and get out of the restaurant business. Then this blonde babe would be out of her hair."

"Don' say this, Inspec'. You know Momma she wouldn't hurt the flea. She chop off her own hand, firs'."

The Marshal bent over the kettle. An inch or so of charred feathery fibre hung down from one of the handles. The blackened fibre had been a cord of some kind. Tied to the kettle. That was damned funny.

He stared up. In the wall, directly above the range and about a foot below the ceiling, was a foot-square ventilating grille. He pointed to it.

"What's on the other side of that, Looey?"

"The wash-a room. Sure. For the employ'."

Pedley crowded past him, went around the meat-cutting block and the bake oven—to the tiny hall off the passageway to the dining room. A steaming film of water screened down across the hall. He put out his hand, yanked it back. The water was scalding.

He pulled his coat up over his head, ducked under it. "Come on, Looey. Come through fast."

Luigi followed him, yelling when the water hit his wrists. He stayed out in the hall, while Pedley went in the washroom. It was dark in the lavatory. There was no current in the wires so the Marshal couldn't switch on the single bulb that hung down from the ceiling. He used his pocket flash, put the beam on the ventilator. There wasn't any cord hanging down inside the metal grille.

He'd been wrong, then. For a minute, there, he'd thought maybe somebody had tied some twine to the handle of that fry kettle and run it up through the ventilator so it could be pulled from inside here and tilt the kettle up enough so the hot fat would slop over the gas flame.

He wasn't sorry. He wanted to think the fire was accidental, to believe Ed was right about having started it. But the setup didn't make it look that way. Everything had happened too fast—right after he'd shown that close-shop order. Then there was the extinguisher. And the dead boy. It just didn't come out even, if the blaze was accidental.

It wasn't until he put out his hand on the edge of the door to close it on his way out that he saw it. A length of some fine, thin fibrous stuff that was almost the same pale yellow as the paint on the wash-room walls and door. It was tied to the paper towel roller that was screwed to the back of the door. It dangled clear to the floor. The end on the cement floor was black and brittle!

He felt of it. It was waxy between his fingers, had hard, sharp edges. It was tough and very hard to break. He knew what it was. But who in hell had brought a piece of dental floss into this place?

"Looey. Take a peek at this." There was a dull grumbling overhead. Outside the storm was about ready to break.

Luigi sidled in through the half-open door. His face was blank as he saw the loose end of the floss in Pedley's fingers. "What'sa you got?"

"The thing that set off the fire," the Marshal said. "I don't mean it was a fuse. This end," he held up the charred end that had been on the floor, "this was three or four yards longer before part of it burned. The part that burned went up there through the ventilator, down outside to that fry kettle." He scowled up at the grille. "You people ever leave this washroom door open, Looey?"

"Sure. In the summer, we leave. To get-a the fresh air in the kitch'."

That was it, then. The floss

could have been tied to the kettle any time the door had been left open. The next time anyone went in the wash-room and closed the door, the waxy cord would tighten. The weight of the door, jerking on the floss, would pull up on the handle of the kettle, spill the grease over onto that gas flame.

He showed Luigi how it worked. If the Italian had ever seen it before, he managed to put on a good act. His face said he couldn't believe his own eyes. "I tell-a you, Inspec'! If anybody—"

"Who was in here last?" The grumbling was louder now, and Pedley knew it wasn't the storm. It was the floor timbers overhead, groaning under the weight of water. If they didn't get out of here fast, they might not get out at all. But he had to get the answer to that question. "Who was in here just before Ed yelled?"

The proprietor's shoulders hunched, the corners of his lips went down.

"You weren't, Looey. You were out at my table." He grabbed the other's shoulder.

"*Si* . . ."

"Your wife wasn't in here."

"Momma, she's at the cash reg', sure."

"Ed couldn't have been. He was beside the kettle when it tipped."

"Maybe Jan, hah?"

"Jan was dead by then."

"Nick, maybe?"

"Nick got splattered with grease, too. He wouldn't have been-splattered if he'd been in here." Pedley pushed Luigi out into the hall. "It must have been the blonde. I saw her come out to the kitchen."

"Lili? No, not Lili!"

"How do you know it wasn't her?"

Luigi didn't answer.

"Okay, Looey. Let's go ask Lili a few questions."

Luigi balked at the solid stream of water that splashed down in front of the kitchen door. A chunk of soggy plaster dropped from the hall ceiling, broke into bits on the Italian's head, knocked him to his knees.

He was too dazed to get up. More plaster crashed down beside the Marshal. Timbers groaned. There was a frightening sound of breaking wood. Pedley couldn't take time to pick Luigi up. He wound his fingers in the proprietor's hair, dragged him through the flooding screen of hot water, into the kitchen.

A white-painted square sagged low, broke loose, swung down on one edge from the ceiling. The floor overhead bulged down. Pedley plunged on.

The edge of the metal sheet caught him across the face, ripped his check open. He lost his

grip on the Italian, reached down, got hold of the man's hair again.

Rubber-clad men pulled them out into the alley. Luigi was praying incoherently. His legs were rubbery beneath him when the Marshal hauled him upright, steered him out to the street. There was more apparatus out in front of the building. Another pumper. Two more hose trucks. The little group Pedley had left beside Jan's body had been herded across the street in case the walls should fall outward.

Nick was standing up, now. So was Lili. Momma was sitting on the curb, moaning. Pedley said: "You were in the wash-room just before the fire broke out, Lili?"

Her chin went up. "What if I was?"

"You set off the fire."

The blonde made a spitting noise. "That's a lousy lie!"

"Didn't say you meant to. Or that you knew you did."

Luigi spluttered. "Was - a string, Lili. Tied to the wash-room door."

"I didn't see any string," she raged.

"It was a piece of dental floss." Pedley dabbed his handkerchief at the blood on his cheek. "Stuff you buy at the drugstore. To clean between your teeth. Comes in those little rolls."

She didn't deny knowing what dental floss was. The fury in her eyes gave way to fear.

"It went up through the lavatory ventilator," the Marshal said. "Carried down on the kitchen side of the wall, was tied to the handle of that fry kettle. When you closed the door, it pulled the string tight, made the grease slop over."

"How would I know anything about that? I didn't even know where the kettle was. Or how much fat there was in it." She whirled around to Nick. "*You'd* be the one to know that!"

The cook glared. "I found out about it, all right." His fingers went up to the burn on his jaw. "Some of it splashed on me. But Ed was the one who kept the kettle full. Ain't that right, Looey?"

Luigi nodded unhappily.

Lili cried: "How would I have any chance to tie a string to the handle of the old kettle? I never got near the small stove. Ed was in there all the time, scraping off dishes and wiping."

"That's right, too," Nick growled. "I was close enough to the stove most of the time. But I didn't see Ed fooling around with no dental whatchamacallit. And you can ask him if *I* was. He'll tell you. He said he bumped into the damn thing. He did, by God! I saw him! I really did!"

"He might have." Pedley watched the brick veneer of the building's front wall sway, lean

outward, tentatively, over the opposite sidewalk. "But somebody rigged up the gadget. Somebody took the trouble to empty that extinguisher there, too, so it wouldn't put out a fire if one should start."

Momma Sonetta's hand reached out suddenly, clutched at the skirt of Lili's uniform. "*You!* the older woman shrilled. "You done it!"

"Leggo of me—" the waitress tried to tear away.

"You think I don't know about you an' my Luigi? Because I say nothing you think I don' know?" Momma pulled herself to her feet by tugging on the skirt. "I keep my mout' shut. Because Luigi, he'sa fool. I can't help if he's fool. But I ain't let you burn down our place like this an' keep my mout' shut. I talk plenty."

"Shuddup, Momma!" Luigi was frantic. "Keep-a quiet."

"No." She let go of the skirt, seized Lili's arm, fiercely, with both hands. "You burn up the rest'raunt so Luigi, he gets insurance money, runs 'way with you."

Lili slapped her hard across the face.

Momma didn't let go her grip on the girl's arm. "You think if he has the money, he runs 'way with you." She dragged the waitress to her, put her face close to Lili's. "You are the fool. Luigi stay with me. You will see. But you — you go to the prison!"

Pedley broke it up. He pried the woman's fingers loose, shoved her away. Lili sobbed wildly. "Make her stop! Someone make her *stop!*"

"You can't blame her," the Marshal said. "The way you streaked out into the kitchen there just before the fire began. What was your hurry?"

"I — I heard you talking to Luigi." The blonde began to sob. "You said — you were going — out to the kitchen — to inspect — the aisle or something."

"Well?"

"I wanted — to warn Nick. So he could — clean it up — before you — got there."

"Mmm." It sounded thin to Pedley. It didn't explain why she'd been so distracted *before* she knew what he came for. Still, she hadn't been the one to tie that string to the kettle, the Marshal was sure of that. The person who set the fire had almost certainly murdered Jan, too. Probably because Jan saw the floss being tied in place. The waitress couldn't possibly have had time in those few seconds after Pedley saw her start for the kitchen and the instant the fire broke out, to kill the bus boy and then get around to the wash-room to slam the door.

But she might be in on the thing, might know about it. He'd have to take her along with the

rest of them, for questioning.

Suddenly, there was a roar like an avalanche, a frenzied shriek from the hook-and-ladder siren. The *Cafe Vesuvius* collapsed.

Pedley pushed Lili and Momma Sonetta back into the shelter of a doorway. A shower of bricking roofing scattered rubble over chips, broken glass and smolder-the street, rattled against the red hoods of the pumpers and hose wagons. An immense column of smoke and steam funneled upward. Sparks fountained high against the blue-black of the thunderheads.

Luigi watched the pyre of his restaurant as if hypnotized.

"Twenny year," he muttered. "Twenny year I work for mak-a the *Vesuv'* the bes' place for eat."

"What are you beefing about?" Nick asked. "You'll get your dough out of it. An' you won't have to bellyache no more about the wages you pay your help. Or squawk your head off every time somebody busts a plate."

"Whatsa matt'?" Luigi wrinkled his forehead angrily. "How many time I keep you onna job when I'm-a lose mon'?" He gestured brusquely. "Whatta hell! I'm-a worse outa luck than you. You can getta the new job tomorr'. How I'm gonna get new place?"

A small, brisk man in a crisp palm-beach suit picked his way over the rubbish strewn by the fallen wall. He set his physician's bag down beside Jan. "This the only victim, Ben?"

Pedley indicated the cook. "This man got a whiff of smoke. They took a dishwasher over to Saint Vincent's with some bad burns."

"You're not in very good shape, yourself."

"Scraped my cheek a bit. That's all."

"Better let me patch you up."

"Little later, doc. I'm busy bug-hunting."

"Oh." The assistant medical examiner bent over Jan. His lips pursed. "This boy wasn't in the fire?"

"No." The Marshal went down on his knees, touched the tip of one finger to the edge of the wound, sniffed. "He got this smash in the skull before the fire started."

"What hit him?"

"I thought maybe you'd tell me, doc. My guess is it was a wine bottle. Something with wine in it, anyway." Pedley touched the matted hair again. "The bottle must have broken. This is wine — some of it."

The physician fished in his bag, produced a pair of tweezers, manipulated them expertly. "Yes," he said. The thin, nickeled tips of his instrument held up a long, straw-colored fibre. One end was stained a deep red.

"Recognize it?"

"Raffia," the Marshal said. "Stuff they net around those Italian wine flasks to keep 'em from cracking. Take care of that, will you? Mark it for identification. It might come in handy." He stood up.

"I'ma tell you, Inspec'," Luigi had difficulty speaking, "if anybody—"

"Yair. Somebody used one of your wine flasks, Looey."

"I keepa th' *grappa* lock up. No one, he'sa get in th' *grappa* cell'."

"Except you." Pedley eyed the sodden wreckage of the *Vesuvius*. His feelings about Luigi's being a pretty good kind of a guy were going to pieces something like the structure over there. Not quite the same, though. The fire was dying down. But the Marshal's regard for the squat cafe man hadn't cooled any. He still liked Luigi—even if the finger was pointing more plainly in the Italian's direction every minute.

Luigi'd been in the cafe kitchen after Jan left the dining room. He had come out only a couple of minutes before Lili went into the wash-room and closed the door. There would have been time for *him* to go down cellar, slug the bus boy over the head and then come up and fix that floss in place.

Luigi would have been able to get in the cafe at any hour, day or night, too. He could have rigged up that kettle-tipping arrangement, tested it out, before any of his employees came in, some morning.

These things were circumstantial. But the bit of raffia was evidence. The wine bottle itself woudl be a clincher. Maybe he could even find the bottle.

"Looey," he motioned. "Nick."

They followed him across the street, into the alley. Some hosemen were uncoupling canvas.

"How about the cellar?" Pedley asked them.

"There's a foot of water, Marshal — and more damn stuff floating around. You want to watch them stairs, too."

Pedley led the two men under a sagging lintel, around splintered beams. The trap door hadn't been blocked. Steam coiled lazily up from the cellar.

He used his flashlight, went down first. The water wasn't a foot deep but the trash was. He wouldn't be able to identify the murder bottle even if he could find it under this mess of refuse.

The others halted on the stairs above him. He swung the beam of his torch around in a semicircle. The light glinted back at him from a hundred round, glassy eyes. He moved toward them. The door to the wine cellar was open. The round eyes were the reflections from the end

of wine bottles, stacked on their sides in the bins.

"You didn't lock up the last time you went in for a bottle of *grappa,* Looey."

"*Si,*" Luigi answered. "You dam' right, I lock."

"Somebody unlocked it again, then."

Nick splashed across the cellar floor. "That kid. He must of had another key."

"Why would he want to get in the wine cellar," the Marshal flashed his light across the bins, looking for some of the raffia-covered flasks, "if it was meat he was stealing?"

"Was cool," Luigi answered. "Nice-a an' cool in here with th' *grappa.* You gotta keep th' beef an' th' pork where it'sa cool if it ain' in the refrig-rat'."

"The walls," Nick added. "They were damp all the time. Keep it cool, see?"

"Yair," said Pedley. "That's not all I see."

He held the flashlight steady on a bottle at the bottom of one bin. Slow drops formed on the under-edge of the bin above — fell with heart-beat regularity on the white label of the bottle.

Where they ran over the curved side of the label, it was bright crimson. No wine, Pedley knew, was ever that color. No wine was as thick and sticky as that.

The three of them stared up at the top bin. Pedley put his foot on the straw nesting of the lower stack, climbed up. There were no bottles in the bin above. Only a brown cardboard box—the kind tailors call a suit box.

He got hold of it, lifted it down. The bottom of the box was sodden, soaked through with blood. He took off the lid. The suit-box was packed with meat. Steaks, lamb chops, a side of bacon, pork sausage, half of a leg of lamb, hamburg. Freshly cut.

Nick swore softly. "He must of pinched thirty pounds there, at least."

Luigi put out his hand, touched each of the meats in turn as if to make sure they were real.

Pedley looked at the cover of the box. In delicate scroll type was printed:

MAISON LA MODE
The finest in fashions
for the modern Miss

Underneath was pasted a stenciled sticker:

MISS LILI DOMBROSKI
241A DOVER LANE
NEW YORK CITY—Prepaid

"Lili," breathed Luigi. "She couldn'!"

Pedley hustled them out of the wine cellar, up the stairs. "I don't suppose this blonde could have wangled the key

away from you, could she, Looey?"

Luigi set his jaw stubbornly. "You ain' gonna mak'a me believe nothing bad about Lili. She ain' come down this cell' an' kill Jan. She didn' set-a no fire, neither. If she's want dough, all she's gotta ask — I give her plenny."

Out on the street the hosemen were taking up their lines. The gutted building sent up a thin plume of white into the dusk but there were no more sparks. Some of the apparatus had already gone. The crowd was thinning, too. The tarpaulin had been thrown back over Jan's body. The assistant medical examiner was still there. But neither Lili nor Momma Sonetta were in sight.

"Where are they, doc?" Pedley was gruff. "Where'd they go?"

"The girl? The stout woman?" The physician seemed surprised. "The blonde one said you'd told her to go home. She was pretty well shot, Ben — so I supposed you'd ordered her to go."

The Marshal winced. "Did they go together?"

"I guess they did. You didn't mean for them to leave, then?"

"Not till I've got this thing cleaned up, doc." Pedley looked for the policeman he'd asked to stand guard. He was up the street, coiling up the fire lines.

"Looey?"

"*Si?*"

"Your friend Lili still live on Dover Lane?"

"Sure."

"Come on, then. Nick, bring that fire extinguisher." He ran toward his red sedan, parked down the block.

There wasn't any certainty Lili would go home. She might just take the first subway to Brooklyn or bus to Jersey. But she was still wearing her uniform. If she *was* going to make a getaway, she'd probably want to get her clothes, first.

He slid behind the wheel, tramped on the starter, had the motor singing by the time the two men hurried up. The sedan rolled away from the curb before Nick and Luigi had the rear doors shut.

The streets were slippery. The storm had broken. Rain filmed on the windshield faster than the wiper could remove it, made visibility poor. But Pedley got the needle up past the 60 M.P.H. mark, kept it there through red lights and around corners.

Two-forty-one A Dover Lane was a converted three-storey, made into one-room apartments. Not exactly Park Avenue, but pretty ritzy for a waitress, the Marshal thought. If she was living on what she'd made at the *Vesuvius* . . .

Her apartment was on the

first-floor-rear. Luigi was reaching for the buzzer button beside her door when they heard the first scream from inside the apartment. It was the blonde who was screaming. But there was another voice raised in querulous tones.

Luigi groaned. "It's Momma!"

"What's the hell she doing here?" Nick asked.

"She'sa fight! Wit' Lili! *Dio'!*" The sound of ripping cloth corroborated him.

"Get away from that door." Pedley got back a couple of steps. "I'm going to kick the door in."

"Wait-a minoot." Luigi jingled a key ring. "This one. He'sa ope' th' door."

The Marshal used it, got the door unlocked.

Momma Sonetta was stooped over a bureau drawer. She lifted a silken garment, wretched at it, tore it to shreds. She threw it on the floor. Lili stood behind her, flailing at her with ineffectual fists, screeching.

The waitress stopped screaming, spun around. "Looey! She's gone crazy! Nick! She's tearing up my things!"

Momma sundered another piece of clothing. "*Your* thing! Was my money bought it. I got a right to tear up. I know where the money come from to buy your swell clothes."

Nick roared at her. "Leave her things alone, you damn' ol' cow! If you want to know, Looey never bought a nickel's worth of them things. *I bought 'em!*" He rushed past Pedley, grabbed the fat woman's neck, hauled her back from the bureau.

Lili screeched a warning. The Marshal picked up a chair, tossed it. Not at Nick. At Luigi. The Italian had whipped out a spring knife, pushed the button. A long, thin blade went in toward the cook's shoulder-blades. It didn't quite get there.

One leg of the chair hit Luigi just above the right eye. He went down with the chair on top of him. But he kept his grip on the knife. Pedley stamped on his wrist. The knife fell out of loosened fingers.

Nick whirled, went sprawling after it.

The Marshal drew his gun. "Let it lay, Nick. If there's going to be any more of the rough stuff, I'll take care of it, myself." He kicked the knife under the bureau. "Stand over there against the wall. Beside Lili."

He caught hold of Momma's right wrist, dragged her away from the bureau. "You people better declare an armistice. or I'll slap you all in jail. I can't be horsing around while you settle your family affairs. I'm after an arsonist."

"You got him," Nick said. "You got him cold. You saw how he

tried to kill me."

"Yair," said Pedley. "He was kind of crazy for a second there. Blew a fuse when he found you and the blonde had been two-timing him. That was his hot temper. But hiding that meat in the wine cellar, killing Jan, setting the fire, that was done strictly in cold blood."

Luigi moaned, rolled over on his side, nursed his wrist between his knees. Over his right eye was a deep gash. Blood ran down across his nose and mouth, making him look very sinister. Momma flopped down on her knees beside him.

"Get a bannage, somebody!" she wailed. "A piece cotton! Quick! He's lose an eye!"

Lili darted toward the bathroom.

Pedley waggled the gun at her. "As you were. I'll get the bandage." He backed into the bathroom, standing where he could see the four of them.

Above the washbowl was a medicine cabinet. He opened it, glanced quickly inside. He saw the one-inch packet of gauze, reached for it. His fingers touched it, brushed against something that rolled off the shelf, fell in the washbowl. It was a glass phial. He picked it up, took it with him when he went out to give the bandage to Momma.

"This does it." He held the tiny bottle up. "The missing link." There was a roll of waxy fibre inside it. "Recognize it, Looey?"

The proprietor put his hand up to his forehead. "My eye, she'sa hurt—"

"Never mind. You'll have time to look at it later. This is dental floss. Same stuff I found in your wash-room — tied to that kettle."

The Marshal juggled the phial in his palm. "Know who took some of this away from here, Miss Dombroski?"

"I haven't any idea."

"You could suggest anyone?"

"No. I can't." The mint-green eyes were wild with fear.

"Well, I can," the Marshal said. "The same guy took it who got you to borrow Looey's wine cellar key long enough to have a duplicate made. Hah, Nick?"

"You said yourself," Nick fingered the burn on his jaw, "it was Looey."

"I said Looey tried to kill you." Pedley glanced at Momma swathing yards of gauze about the Italian's head. "Don't act surprised at that. You knew what to expect if he got wise you were two-timing him with the girl."

'Ah," Nick sneered. "I got as much right—"

"Sure," the Marshal nodded. "As much right as to double-cross him by stealing a couple hundred pounds of meat a week, by hiding it in the wine cellar, taking it out when you left the

cafe at night, peddling it around the next morning."

"Looey, he was stealing that meat from himself!" the cook raged. "He must of been selling it on the side. To pay for the rent on this place of Lili's. He could not take no dough out of his own cash register. His old lady was watching him like a hawk."

"I don't know anything about it," Lili said between her teeth. "I never asked for his old money. Or yours either, Nick. Or where you got it. I didn't know where either of you got your money."

She'd been frightened all along, Pedley decided, because she'd suspected where Nick's cash had been coming from.

The Fire Marshal put the phial of floss in his pocket. "Looey might have been dumb about some things, Nick. Not dumb enough to figure he'd do better selling meat to the black market than to his own customers. Anyhow, if he'd been doing that, he wouldn't have had to use one of the girl's suit-boxes to hide the stuff in. He wouldn't have had to keep it down in the wine cellar. He could have left it all in the refrigerator. Only taken out what he wanted when he was ready to sell it."

"Why couldn't I do the same thing?" Nick asked. "If I'd wanted to put something over?"

"You couldn't have people coming around to the cafe and asking for you, the way Looey could. You had to take the steaks outside to see 'em. So you had to grab the stuff first thing in the morning before anybody else got down to the cafe. You packed it away there in the wine cellar where nobody'd be likely to look. Then you stayed after the cafe closed, smuggled the meat out." Pedley reached around to his left hip pocket, took out nickeled handcuffs.

"Nick!" groaned Luigi. "Nick! You dog! You ruin' me!"

"Don't give me no guff, Looey." The cook was bitter. "You an' this fire-cop are tryin' to make me the goat. You don't get away with it, see?"

Pedley said: "You can't pass the buck. Looey told you the ration board inspector was going to make an arrest because they'd traced a roast or something back to the *Vesuvius* — you began to get worried. You rigged up that kettle-tipping arrangement, just in case you had to cover up fast sometime." He kept his gun pointed at Nick's belly. "When Lili said there was an inspector out in the dining-room, you thought the jig was up. You must have gone down to the wine cellar to see if you could find a better spot to hide that suit-box. I suppose you had to come up to cook an order before you found a new hiding place."

"Why don't you find out what Jan was doin' down cellar before you claim it was me?"

"The boy got frightened," Pedley said, "when Looey accused him of stealing. Maybe Jan thought he'd really be arrested by the ration board inspector. Even if he hadn't done anything. So he went prowling around, found the meat. You went down again, found Jan. You picked up one of those raffia-covered flasks and brained him."

Nick's lips curled back over his upped teeth. "I never touch him. I never see him."

"Yair," Pedley rattled the bracelets. "After you killed him, you got panicky. You had to do something to keep the body from being found. So you set your firetrap, burned the cafe."

The cook retreated. "You couldn't prove I touched Jan," he snarled. "Not in a million years."

"We might have a little trouble proving the murder," Pedley admitted. "You'd have been all alone with him down there. Nobody saw either of you go down cellar. The wine flask won't be so much help, even if we find it. But," he jammed the gun harder into Nick's navel, "there won't be any difficulty about showing you peddled Looey's meat. About proving you bonfired his restaurant."

Lili broke in angrily. "They might have thought I did it, Nick. On account of it was my dental floss. Maybe you *tried* to make it look as if I did it!" Her face wasn't pretty, now.

Pedley grabbed the cook's right wrist. "He was only trying to set up an alibi. All these arson guys think all they have to do is get some sort of screwy alibi so nobody sees them actually set a fire—and they go scot free." He muscled the cook up against the wall. "This one won't go free. He's got two strikes on him right now. The floss—and the meat. And there's a third strike coming up." He snapped the first cuff on the hairy wrist. He went on:

"I'll find out whether you left your prints inside that fire extinguisher when you took out the refill to empty it." Pedley clicked the second bracelet in place. "You'd have been careful to polish off the outside of the extinguisher so no one could tell who'd handled it last. But my money says you forgot to wipe the fingerprints off the *inside.*"

From the ugly glint in Nick's eyes, the Marshal was sure he wasn't wrong. "If I'm right, Nick, you won't be doing any cooking for a long time." He slipped the pistol in his pocket. "You won't unless you're on the hot end of the griddle."

(Continued from other side)

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